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FERRETS.





LAID UP.

FERRETS

THEIR MANAGEMENT IN HEALTH AND DISEASE
WITH REMARKS ON THEIR LEGAL STATUS

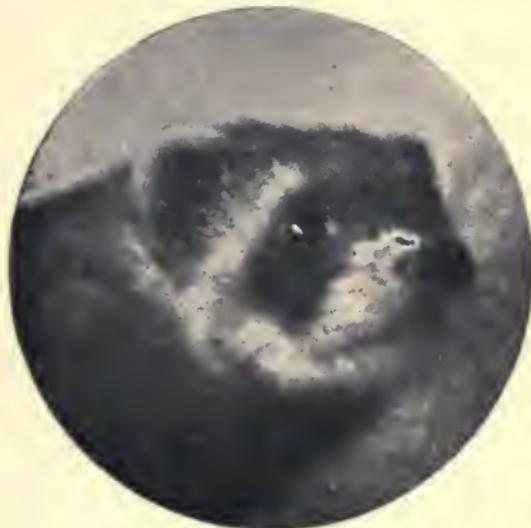
BY

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‘PRACTICAL NOTES ON CRASSES AND GRASS GROWING IN EAST ANGLIA,’ ETC.



WITH FORTY-TWO ILLUSTRATIONS BY THE AUTHOR AND OTHERS

LONDON
ADAM AND CHARLES BLACK

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PREFACE

THE approbation accorded to the short articles on "Ferrets and all about them," which appeared in *The Shooting Times*, backed up by urgent requests from many of my readers, has induced me to reprint them with additions and alterations in the present form.

The criticisms to which a writer who publishes a handbook on any subject lays himself open, may, I think, be subordinated under two heads. Firstly, Is *any* work on the subject required, and if that question is answered in the affirmative,

then, secondly, Does the work under review meet the requirement?

The usefulness of the little animal to which this volume is devoted can hardly be denied by any one, and this, coupled with the fact that up to the present time no standard or practical work on the subject has ever been issued, appears from my point of view to be a satisfactory answer to the first of the above questions. What should be the answer to the second heading is not for me to say, but I venture to hope that the following pages may furnish some useful as well as interesting information to many persons who keep ferrets for pleasure or for profit.

Whilst the book is the result of practical experience, I cannot expect it to be altogether free from errors in substance,

or that all of my opinions should go unchallenged. Nevertheless I venture to hope that these my humble efforts may be the means of supplying a vacancy which has too long existed in the sportsman's library.

NICHOLAS EVERITT.

NORWICH, 1st *March* 1897.

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CHAPTER I

The artful, cruel, slender ferret, too,
Delights in blood——

Origin of name—The ferret—The polecat—The common weasel—The stoat—The marten.

COMPREHENSIVE as the title of this work may appear, the author nevertheless trusts that before the reader has finished his perusal he will consider it was aptly chosen. The subject matter should be interesting alike to naturalists and sportsmen—to the former because ferrets are not found *feræ naturæ* in the British Isles, and must be acclimatised and domesticated; to the latter because of the sport they give, alike to shooter,

trapper, rabbit-courser, or vermin destroyer.

To commence at the very beginning, let us analyse the word itself. Turning for the purpose to the dictionaries we find :—

FERRET (fe'ret), n. [Probably like the G. *frett*, *frettchen*, O.G. *frette*, *furette*, ferret, borrowed from a romance word, such as Fr. *furet*, It. *furetto*, L.L. *furectus*, *fureetus*, *furo*, the origin of which seems to be the L. *fur*—a thief. We find, however, also Armour *fured*, Gael. and Fr. *fered*, ferret; W. *ffured*, that which is subtle, crafty, or cunning, a ferret; from *ffur*, Armour *fur*, cunning, wily, crafty; so that the real origin of our word, as well as the relationship of all these words, is somewhat dark.] A variety of the genus *Mustela*, most closely allied to the polecat, about 14 inches in length, of a pale yellow colour, with red eyes. It is a native of Africa, but has been intro-

duced into Europe. It cannot, however, bear cold, and cannot exist in France except in a domestic state. Ferrets are used in catching rabbits to drive them out of their holes.

Then follow other meanings of the word. To the genus *Mustela*, or family *Mustelidae*, many species belong, including the polecat, stoat, weasel, and marten, which are all closely related to the ferret, and crosses of breed have been reported with each named. The otter, badger, skunk, ichneumon, genet, civet, zubert, glutton, and racoon are also closely allied to the genus *Putorius*,¹ although they could hardly be classified as *Mustelines* proper.

As allusion may be made to some of the above named from time to time, it may be well, before entering into our subject, to devote a little space to a

¹ This genus comprises animals which have the head rounded, the fur brilliant and soft, the tail long, and anal glands which secrete a foetid matter.

brief consideration of the former species named, so that no confusion may hereafter arise.

THE FERRET (*Mustelo furo*)

The Ferret, a native of Africa, is found in a domesticated state in almost every village in England, and although constantly lost (when at work) and left to roam at large, no instances are recorded (at least to the writer's knowledge) where it has thrived and multiplied in the British Isles when left to its own resources. By whom and when ferrets were first introduced into this country is not known, but certain it is that they have been used by our ancestors for the past five hundred years at least. The body of the ferret is long and thin, its head narrow with a sharp snout, and its eyes pink; in colour it is a creamy white. This description applies to a true bred ferret. The cross

breds are naturally different and partake of the peculiarities of each of their parents (as in the crossing of any other animals); but of this hereafter. Some naturalists have expressed it as their opinion that the ferret and the polecat are one and the same animal, and the variety in colour and size is only a peculiarity. Nowadays all doubts on this point seem to be cleared up and the distinction is marked. The ferret when trained is as quiet, inoffensive, and docile an animal as any one can wish for, but when at work it is fierce, bloodthirsty, and relentless. When riled it emits a nauseous odour, a characteristic of the genus *Putorius*, and although it feeds upon what many would style objectionable food, which it stores up near its nest, it is, at the same time, scrupulously clean in all its habits.

Rabbits and rats seem to be its special quarry from birth, and if a dead rabbit or rat be thrown down or held near a young

ferret that has never seen one before, it will at once spring at it and worry it. If the victim be alive it will attach itself to its neck and not leave its hold until it has gorged itself upon its heart's blood.

Although we more often hear ferrets spoken of as "so many couple of ferrets," Strutt tells us that in ancient times a number of ferrets would be described by the sportsmen of the middle ages as "a fesynes of ferrets." The same author, referring to other animals, quotes :—"A skulk of foxes, a cete of badgers, a richess of martens, a husk or a down of hares, a nest of rabbits, a clowder of eats, a kendel of young cats, and a labour of moles"; all of which terms are now more or less strange to the ear of the present school of sportsmen. Keepers generally designate the male ferret, "buck," "dog" or "hob," and the female ferret, "doe," "bitch" or "Jill."

THE POLECAT (*Mustela putorius*)

This animal is also known as fitchew, fitchet, and foumart. At one time the polecat was common in all parts of the United Kingdom, but it is now rapidly becoming extinct. It seems from its characteristics and outward appearance to be more closely allied to the ferret than any other of its congeners. In size it is large, being generally from 15 to 18 inches in length, exclusive of the tail, for which may be added at least another 4 or 5 inches; in colour it is dark brown or chocolate, with white checks to its face, and sometimes white-nosed. Like all others of the genus *Putorius*, its body is elongated, slender, and very flexible, enabling it to wind about in and out small crevices in following its prey.

Another distinction belonging to this race of animals, particularly apparent in

the polecat, consists in an unctuous matter exuding from glands placed near the anus, which emit an extremely offensive smell ; in the civet cat, marten, and the pine weasel, etc., this exudation affords an agreeable perfume.

The polecat is exceedingly fierce and courageous. It will often repel a dog, and when unable to conquer, will fight unflinchingly to the bitter end. Although of a carnivorous stock there are many instances on record where polecats have proved themselves expert fishers, and have carried their spoil some distance to store it in their lairs.

Comparing the polecat with the marten, we find it somewhat smaller, its tail is shorter, its nose more pointed, and the bristles of its pelt thicker and darker. Its cry is also dissimilar, the cry of the marten is shrill, sharp, and loud ; whereas that of the polecat is deeper and more sepulchral.

The polecat-ferret, or a cross-bred animal between a polecat and a ferret, is well known and much esteemed throughout the whole kingdom; which is the better of the two—the cross-bred or the pure bred—is always a debatable point between those who have had anything whatever to do with ferrets and their keeping. It is a subject on which the writer has never yet met with two men whose views and opinions are identical, and he is still of an undecided opinion, although he has had considerable experience with both breeds. One practical incident coming under his notice is, perhaps, worthy of note. A doe ferret was lost for several weeks, having in the interval been crossed by a wild polecat, and the progeny proved a most excellent litter of bold, energetic, and courageous animals. The result of such a cross is immediately noticeable. Polecat-ferrets are either much larger or much smaller

than clean-bred ferrets. Their colours partake of the parentage of each, as also do their eyes. They are much more shy when young and more difficult to train ; they are, as a rule, harder, more savage, and quicker in their work. But then all ferrets are not alike, and what applies to one strain of blood would not, as a matter of course, apply to another. For ratting one generally prefers small polecat-ferrets, and for rabbiting clean-bred white ferrets.

Why the polecat has never been taken in hand and trained to rabbiting, etc., it is difficult to understand. Probably there are many who have experimented in this direction, and if they would only place their experiences in print they would be most interesting ; practical results are more valuable than any amount of theorising.

In trapping polecats it is a curious coincidence that if one be caught you are almost certain to catch others in the

immediate neighbourhood in the same trap. Apparently it is the smell they omit in their rage at being caught which gives rise to this fatal attraction.

THE COMMON WEASEL (*Mustela vulgaris*)

The name weasel is common to the digitigrade carnivorous animals belonging to the genus *Mustela*. True weasels are distinguished by their lithe and slender bodies, their short feet, separate toes, and sharp claws. They are natives of almost all temperate and cold parts of the northern hemisphere, and are, perhaps, the best known of the *Mustelidae* family in the British Isles, of which family they are the smallest variety. In height they measure from 2 to 3 inches, in length from 7 to 8, whilst the tail is from 2 to 3 inches long. The body is extremely slender and arched, the head small and flattened, the neck long, and the legs

short. The colour is a bright reddish brown, except the belly and underneath the neck, which is white. Notwithstanding its diminutive size, no animal is so destructive in warrens and among poultry. When a weasel enters a hen-roost, it rarely, if ever, meddles with the cocks or the old hens. It makes choice of the pullets and the young chickens, and these it kills by a single stroke on the head, and drags them away one after another. The common weasel is also a great destroyer of eggs, which it sucks with avidity. Shakespeare mentions this when he says—

I can suck melancholy out of a song, as a weasel
sucks eggs.

And again—

the weasel Scot
Comes sneaking, and so sucks her princely eggs.

But the weasel in a measure counter-balances these depredations by taking up his winter residence in granaries, hay-

lofts, and outhouses, where he carries on incessant war with the rats and mice with more success than a cat can even aspire to, since by following them into their holes it is next to an impossibility for them to escape. In Norfolk they are commonly called "mouse-hunters." They also climb up to pigeon-houses, to the nests of sparrows, etc., and commit great havoc.

Like the polecat and the ferret, these animals work by smell more than by any other means, and a close observer may occasionally see a sparrow or other small bird caught by them whilst sitting on the top of a straw or corn stack. The weasel is working in the straw just beneath the outer layer, and, smelling its quarry, works quietly up to it, suddenly darting out its head, and seizing the struggling victim before it has any chance of escape.

The female weasel often remains in the granaries or stacks until the spring,

in order to bring forth her progeny, which are usually about four or five in number, and are deposited by her in a warm nest prepared for their reception. Although born blind, they in an incredibly short space of time attain a sufficiency of growth and strength to follow their mother to the chase. The nest is often found in peculiar places, dry hedgerows, marsh walls, deserted rabbit holes, old trees, heaps of stones; and M. Buffon, the celebrated French naturalist, narrates that in his neighbourhood a weasel with three young ones was found in the body of a wolf that had been suspended from a tree by the hind feet, and, although the wolf was completely putrescent, the weasel had formed a nest in its thorax.

The same author asserted the impossibility of taming the weasel, but his error has been corrected by experiment, for in some instances it has been rendered as familiar as a dog or a squirrel—at least,

so Mr. John Bigland says, although the writer has never had ocular demonstration to such an extent. Should the reader wish to experiment in this direction it will be advisable for him to obtain his intended pets when they are very young indeed ; he should always attend to them himself, and handle them as much as possible. Moderate correction and chastisement if they attempt to bite will also be found necessary to achieve good results. In confinement they never appear resigned to their lot, or even contented, as they will always be found in a perpetual state of agitation, except when sleeping after a meal. When caught asleep, in contradiction to the old proverb, a peculiarity can be observed. Their muscles are so extremely flaccid that they may be taken up by the head and swung to and fro like a pendulum before they awake.

The weasel is more cunning, quicker, less fierce, and smaller than the stoat,

and has no black tip to its tail. But it hunts like the stoat, and is very similar to it in most of its habits, although it breeds earlier.

Gamekeepers destroy weasels, as they do considerable mischief amongst the young and early birds, but, apart from this, they are comparatively harmless, and should be preserved rather than destroyed. They are known to kill, *inter alia*, hares, rabbits, grown-up birds of almost every species, adders, water-rats, voles, moles, mice, and one instance is recorded where an eagle, which had seized a weasel, carried it high up into the air; the little captive so far disengaged himself as to bite its enemy in the throat, which soon brought him to the ground, and thus effected its escape.

In Norway and throughout Scandinavia the weasel is very common. The local name is *Reise-kat*—literally translated, travelling cat. It derives its name,

as is commonly the case in Scandinavia with birds, beasts, and fishes, from its peculiarity, its habit of always being on the move. The writer has spent many an idle hour watching these interesting little quadrupeds popping in and out the loose stones and boulders on the mountain side, as well as listening to the hundred-and-one anecdotes which any observant native always has ready to relate to those who care to give him a hearing. It was but recently, one delightful July evening, when casting for trout at the mouth of a small stream, running into the clear waters of the Hardanger fjord, a *reise-cat*, more confiding than his English relatives would be, endeavoured to appropriate an artificial minnow which was attached to a line. The boatman, who obtained his living by fishing in summer and hunting in winter, was highly amused ; he was full of anecdote. He told how he had often been deceived by them, mistaking them

for otters, by the arm in the water, which they would naturally make when swimming over a perfectly calm surface. And again, when he had been fishing one day, he left his boat to go on shore for a few minutes. On his return he found a weasel eating his fish, of which they are particularly fond. Covering the fish with his coat, he once more journeyed on shore; coming back in a few minutes, he rowed out on the fjord, and, on lifting his coat, found his uninvited guest had also returned, and was beneath it. The little creature in great consternation ran round the gunwale of the boat several times, finally jumped overboard and swam ashore. Much more could be said about the common weasel, but perhaps the reader's patience is already exhausted, and further space ought not to be allotted to it.

THE STOAT (*Mustela erminea*)

It is not commonly known that the stoat and the ermine are identical, but such is the fact, and there is about as much difference between them as there is between an ordinary hare and a white hare. The stoat is found almost everywhere in Europe, but is more common in the north. In winter, in cold countries, the fur changes from a russet-brown colour to white, slightly tinged with yellow. The tip of the tail is always black, while the edge of the ears and the extremity of its feet are white. When thus clad in its winter garb it is known as the ermine.

In this country it is a common occurrence to find the stoat, or, as it is sometimes called, minifa (*Minerva*), or lobster, nailed to the rails of the gamekeeper's larder. Stoats have a great partiality for marshlands and low-lying coverts,

and they appear to like the water almost as well as they do the land. In early spring they are a sure find upon the marshes, and if pursued will seek refuge in any hole they can find, even burrowing, when pressed, into a mole-hill.

For breeding and residential purposes the stoat selects a dry hedgerow, ruin, wall, mossy bank, or old hollow tree, and it generally betrays its presence by depositing its dung opposite the entrance. Its lair is cosy and well lined with dry moss, fur, hair, and feathers. It is not very prolific, producing but one litter of four to six youngsters per annum. These are born blind and suckled until they can hunt their own quarry to the death. Long before they can see young stoats will suck blood and eat flesh, and vermin destroyers often assert they have drawn young stoats from their lair by placing freshly-killed game just outside, the scent soon attracting them.

Stoats are very similar to weasels in many respects. They do not work well in damp weather; possibly it is because scent is faint, and they invariably hunt by scent and not by sight. There are few who have spent much of their time in the country, and take an interest in, and are only casual observers of, natural history, who have not once or more during their experience seen stoats hunting a hare or rabbit, and they must have been impressionably struck by the ruthless mercy exhibited by them when upon the track of their luckless victim. If the young ones are in company with their parents, they seem more bloodthirsty than one would possibly imagine. The terrified rabbit or hare, whichever it may happen to be, at first runs away hard, but the slow and sure hunters follow like a pack of hounds with persistent and relentless zeal. When they overtake their victim, it spurts again and again, until it

seems to become paralysed with fear, and crouches trembling all over in an exhausted and pitiable condition. The deadly spring of its destroyer, as it seizes it by the throat, causes one heartrending shriek, and all is at an end. Having sucked the blood, the old stoats and their promising offspring endeavour to drag away the lifeless carcase to some hole or cranny, there to store it in anticipation of another meal at no very distant date. It is comparatively easy to distinguish a rabbit or hare which has thus fallen a victim, in comparison with one which meets its death from other vermin. There will be found a deep wound in the throat, the eyes will be gouged out, and the side of the head often eaten away as well as the inside of the skull.

The food of the stoat comprises, besides rabbits and hares, rats, mice, voles, moles, young birds, chickens, frogs, and eggs. Although it measures 18 inches in length,

it has been known to make a meal of a mole and then appropriate its hole for a temporary summer abode.

The male is distinctly larger than the female, and stoats often fight amongst themselves. A stoat fight is not easily forgotten ; it is fierce and revolting, and the stench they emit while it is in progress is something too obnoxious for anything.

The stoat begins to change colour in November, and in March it resumes its summer vesture. It rarely turns white in England, but a change is noticeable at the periods mentioned.

THE MARTEN

is also a digitigrade carnivorous quadruped, belonging to the same family as the ferret. There are several species, amongst them being the pine marten (*Mustela martes*, or *Martes abictum*), which concerns us

but little, and the stone marten (*Mustela foina*), which is closer allied. The stone marten is a sharp-snouted, lively little customer, whose lithe body measures 18 to 20 inches, with a bushy tail not more than half that length; its fur is dense, long, and of a dullish brown colour. A frequenter of our homesteads, it is often a great destroyer of poultry and pigeons; but, on the other hand, its natural quarry seems to be rats and mice, and the good it does must be taken into consideration by its would-be exterminator. It is wonderfully prolific, and is closely allied in almost all respects with the three other *Mustelidæ*, which have been herein more particularly alluded to. The various other branches of this great family *Mustelidæ* need hardly be mentioned, and, unless occasion requires, it is not proposed to refer to them further than has already been done.

CHAPTER II

FERRET HUTCHES

BEFORE one can start keeping and breeding ferrets with success it is essential that a fit and proper place be found to keep them in. More often one finds on visiting the lockers of owners of these animals that they are confined anywhere but where they should be. A dark, dismal corner of some draughty outhouse or stable seems a favourite nook for ferret keepers. Any old box, tub, tea-chest, or rough bits of board patched together seem to satisfy, and it is wonderful to note how well the animals, in some instances, thrive and multiply in these by no means congenial residences, especially when one considers

their fastidious nature and habits. If one can with fair success handle ferrets by these rough and ready means, what results cannot one hope for when one's animals are properly housed, properly fed, and properly looked after?

First, then, let us consider the site and position for our ferret house. Whether it be small or large, it is advisable to select for its situation a nice, dry, sheltered spot, having a south aspect. If it is intended to keep only a small number of ferrets, hutches will be found quite sufficient for all requirements. And let it be here thoroughly impressed upon the intending ferret keeper that these hutches or boxes should be well made, well ventilated, and well finished off. More than half the diseases which attack ferrets are traceable to insanitary conditions and slovenly manufacture of the hutches. Should it not be convenient to manufacture one's own hutches, there are

several manufacturers who will in a few days fix up, at a reasonable cost, any conceivable kind of ferret box, hutch, court, or yard that may be desired. If required on an extensive scale, it would be as well to communicate, ask-

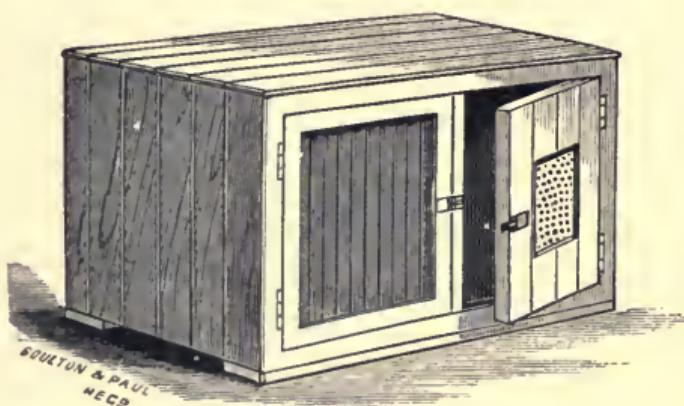


FIG. 1.

ing for plans and estimates, the prospective purchaser of course giving full particulars of his requirements. Fig. 1 represents a small ferret hutch, suitable for housing one or a couple of ferrets. Its measurements are as follows:—Height, 18 inches; depth, 18 inches; and length, 3 feet. It is made from red

deal, painted with three coats of impenetrable paint, and is divided into two separate compartments of equal magnitude. It can be observed, from the drawing appended, that each compartment



FIG. 2.

has a separate door opening on the whole front; also that the sleeping chamber is well ventilated by a let-in panel of perforated zinc or fine meshed wire netting. The reason should be obvious, and it only remains to add that cleanliness with ferrets is the most important rule to be observed. Fig. 2 shows

another view of the same hutch raised from the ground some 3 or 4 feet. In no case keep your ferrets in a hutch or kennel which stands upon the ground. It seems to be the nature of a ferret hutch to become saturated with moisture, and this is one of the evils to be contended with. By raising the hutch high above the ground dampness is in a measure avoided, and better ventilation secured.

The roof of a ferret hutch should be made watertight, and felt, or other roofing, dressed and painted at intervals, is largely used for this purpose.

The last-mentioned hutch may answer the purpose very well, but it is advisable, if a large number of animals are kept, to build a lean-to, somewhat after the style illustrated in Fig. 3. The drawing is hardly intended for the purpose for which it is now used, but it illustrates the meaning which is wished to be conveyed. If a light lean-to of wood or iron, with felt

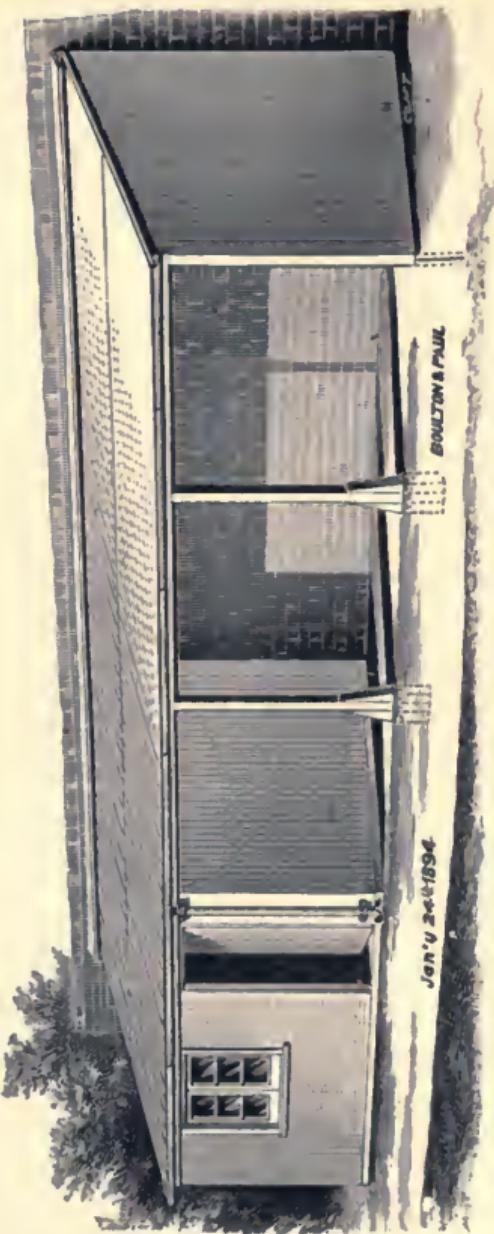


FIG. 3.

or canvas roofing, well waterproofed, or with a corrugated iron roofing, as here shown, be erected, it will be found most convenient for the purpose suggested, and one's animals will be protected against

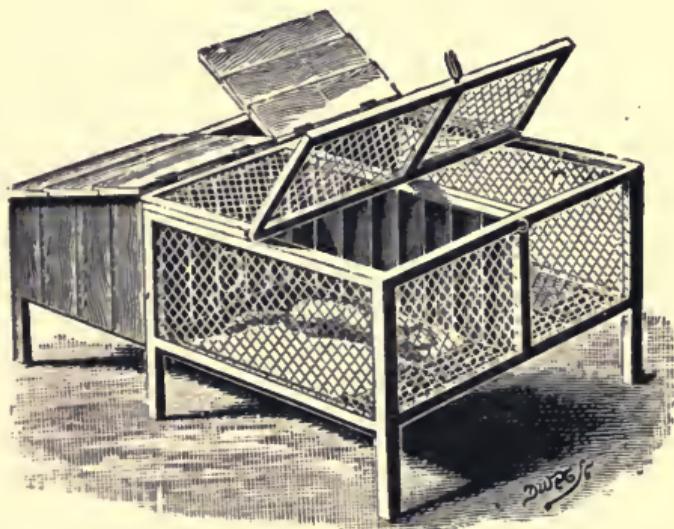


FIG. 4.

inclement elements. A small shed may well be made at one end of this lean-to, in which to keep food, medicines, working-boxes, spades, spuds, copies, lines, bags, and other requisites. Fig. 4 represents a well-constructed double ferret hutch, with runs. Every arrangement is made for

cleanliness, and the floor of the run is sloped in front, so it can be rinsed down as often as required, without trouble or inconvenience; besides, all moisture runs away of its own accord. These hutches



FIG. 5.

are made in two sizes, the smaller measuring 4 feet long, 3 feet wide, and 2 feet high. The

larger sizes are made to order, and as required. Fig. 5 shows an improved galvanised iron feeding-pan, which is usually made 6 inches by 4 inches, by 2 inches deep. It is sufficiently heavy to prevent the ferrets being able to upset it, and it can easily be washed out. It will be found far preferable to the ordinary earthenware pan or saucer which one finds in general use. Larger sizes are also used in accordance with requirements. It will be as well to select those with rounded bottoms, which prevent

the food accumulating in the corners. Fig. 6 is a representation of a hutch

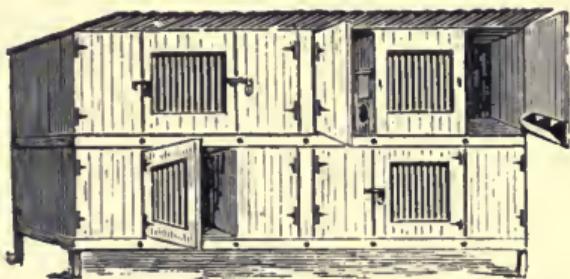


FIG. 6.

capable of holding many ferrets. The upper hutches have divisions for breeding

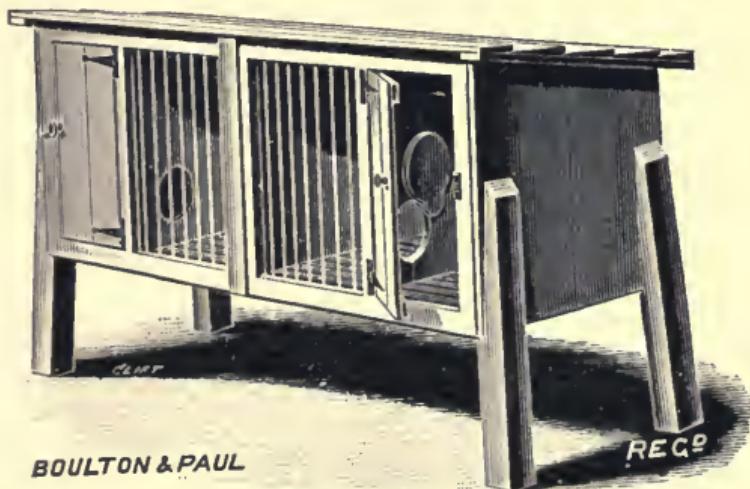


FIG. 7.

purposes, and the lower ones are for single or young stock. Zinc trays are also fitted

under the floors. The measurement of the hutch here depicted is 7 feet 6 inches long, by 5 feet 6 inches high. Fig. 7 is of a more or less new pattern, and is capable of holding two lots of ferrets, or it would be found most convenient for breeding. It is a double outdoor hutch on raised legs, measuring 4 feet 8 inches by 2 feet.

Many people prefer to let their ferrets run about loose in large huts, houses, or in loose-boxes in a stable, but this of course is a matter of taste.

The author has had his attention called to other forms of hutch, some of which are well worth noticing. A double hutch, with the centre division removable, is shown in Fig. 8. This hutch has a hinged partition at each end, which can be hooked up out of the way when not wanted, and its floor is also hinged at the back, and drops down for cleaning out. There is a separate wire

door to each compartment, and the dimensions are as follows :—For a double hutch, 6 feet long, 2 feet wide, and 1 foot 10 inches high ; for a single hutch, on the

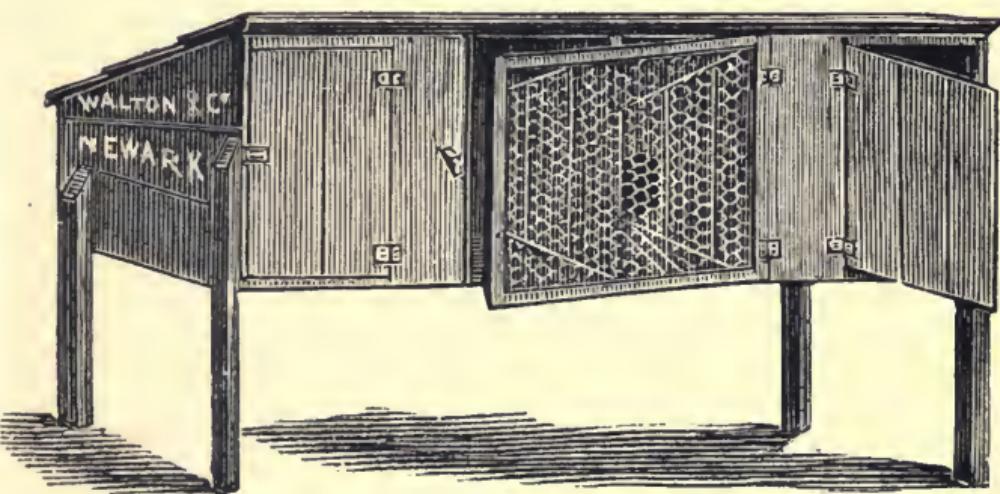


FIG. 8.

same principle, 3 feet long, 2 feet wide, and 1 foot 10 inches high. Each has splined flooring and sliding tray. Another outdoor hutch is illustrated by Fig. 9. The upper tier has separate compartments for breeding purposes, while underneath is a commodious run for the young ones or for single ferrets. All the

doors are hung with strong joints and fitted with japanned buttons and knobs. The interior is fitted with the necessary feeding troughs, and the floors are trenched and arranged with $1\frac{1}{2}$ inch fall for drainage, to keep the hutch dry. Handles are

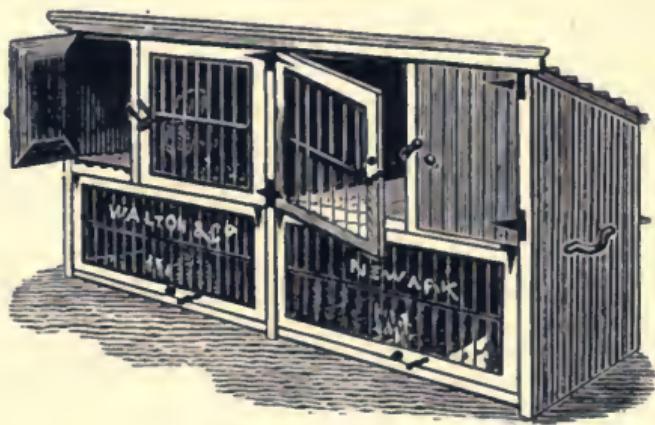


FIG. 9.

provided at the ends for removing, if such is desired. The length is 6 feet; height in front 4 feet; back 3 feet 9 inches; and it is 2 feet wide. Fig. 10 depicts a hutch which is made in order that it may be attached to a wall, and has been designed for persons having limited space at their disposal. This hutch can be hung up on

a wall out of the way. The sleeping box is raised from the floor, and it can be closed from the outside by a very simple device, the ferrets being shut in whilst the hutch is cleaned. The floor is covered with splines laid very close together. There is a tray to draw out for cleaning,



FIG. 10.

and it is claimed by the makers that foot-rot and other diseases so common amongst ferrets are in some measure prevented by using hutches thus constructed. There is a drinking trough for feeding outside, the length is 3 feet, width 18 inches, and height 18 inches. In Fig. 11 we have a span-roofed hutch, designed either for

indoor or outdoor use. It contains two separate hutches, each having a sleeping compartment or nest box, with entrance to both at a door in the centre. If desired, however, the partitions forming



FIG. 11.

the lower nest box can be withdrawn, thus making one large hutch with one raised nest box. The doors at each end have wire netting fixed across them, but to obtain warmth in cold weather, or in exposed situations, they are provided with an extra hinged door, as shown, which fits into the square netting,

in order to render the hutch warm and weatherproof. The hutch is also fitted with loose drinking troughs, splined floor, and tray underneath to draw out for

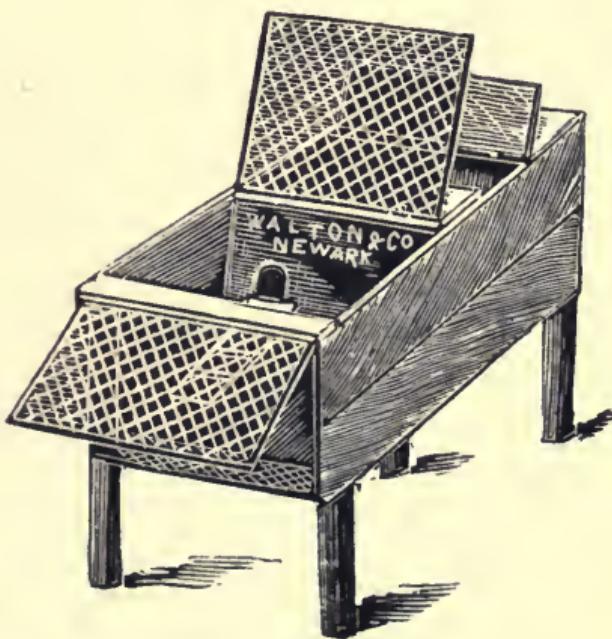


FIG. 12.

cleaning. Its length is 4 feet, height 2 feet 6 inches, and its width 3 feet, whilst the legs are 2 feet long from the floor of the hutch.

Fig. 12 represents a hutch, the floor of which is covered with small splines laid

very close and small, and the under floor lets down for cleaning out. There is a separate division for sleeping and breed-



No. 1.



No. 2.



No. 3.



No. 4.



No. 5.

FIG. 13.

ing, so contrived that the young ferrets cannot crawl out of their nests.

The feeding troughs shown above are well worthy of notice. They are made of improved stoneware, white enamelled inside and brown glazed outside, in

various shapes, as illustrated, and, being furnished with a flange round the inside, prevent waste. They can be obtained from the makers in all sizes and at reasonable prices.

CHAPTER III

FERRET YARDS OR COURTS

HAVING now dwelt at some length upon ferret hutches, it behoves us to turn attention to ferret yards—or perhaps it would be more correct to style them ferret courts. The remarks made in reference to Fig. 3 on page 30 apply equally to ferret yards and courts, and the suggestion is without doubt a useful one if it can be applied without inconvenience.

Ferrets, as is well known, have a natural antipathy to water, and they will rarely work well in wet ground or during heavy rain. *Ergo*, if their yards are exposed, they will not take their exercise unless the ground is dry and according to

their liking. But should the yard be built under the shelter of a lean-to, it will rarely if ever become wet, and the animals confined there can enjoy outdoor exercise to their heart's content at all seasons. The size and extent of these yards vary of course in accordance with the ideas of their owner and the number of animals which it is desired to accommodate. Not being able to obtain a good illustration of a proper ferret yard (the demand being somewhat limited), the writer has used a block depicting a range of lean-to terrier kennels in order the better to illustrate to the reader what is meant by ferret yards, and with the assistance of this it is hoped the idea will be fully conveyed. Fig. 14 is the drawing referred to, and answers in all respects to a range of ferret yards or courts with these trifling exceptions. The food boxes, which are depicted as raised some inches from the ground, should be so fitted that they are

on a level with the floor bricks; and the corrugated iron skirting board which

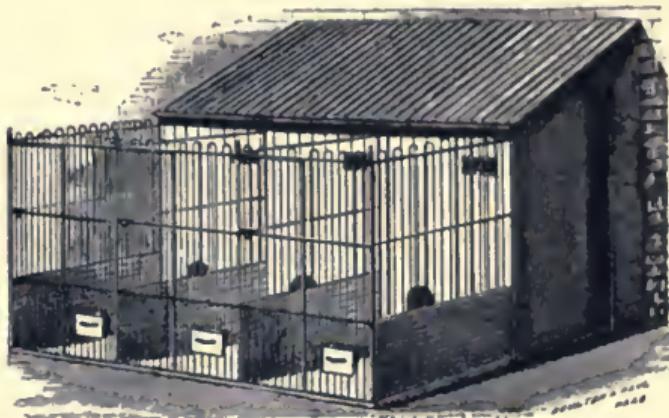


FIG. 14.

extends along each side of the runs should be continued round the front, leaving of course trap doors for the food boxes.

The sleeping boxes or beds inside should be raised a foot at least from the brick or tiled floor, and a small wooden plank, with cross pieces for foothold, fixed from the floor of the yard to the inlet to enable the ferrets

to ascend and descend. The outside



FIG. 15.

benches in the yards are not necessary, nor are the interior doors required to be made to open if the sides of the beds are raised fairly high and a lid placed on each, which is the course usually adopted. A slip tray or false bottom should be fitted to each interior compartment to facilitate cleaning, and thorough ventilation must always be provided. These yards are not as a rule used for breeding, nor are they used for working ferrets when in use, as they tend to make the animals wild and shy. But they will be found most convenient and useful when the hutches are overstocked, or when the quantity of young ferrets becomes excessive, as without doubt a large number of ferrets can be kept in these enclosures in greater comfort, in a more healthy condition, and with better success, than they can be kept in hutches or in small boxes. The inlet hole between the sleeping and the exercise

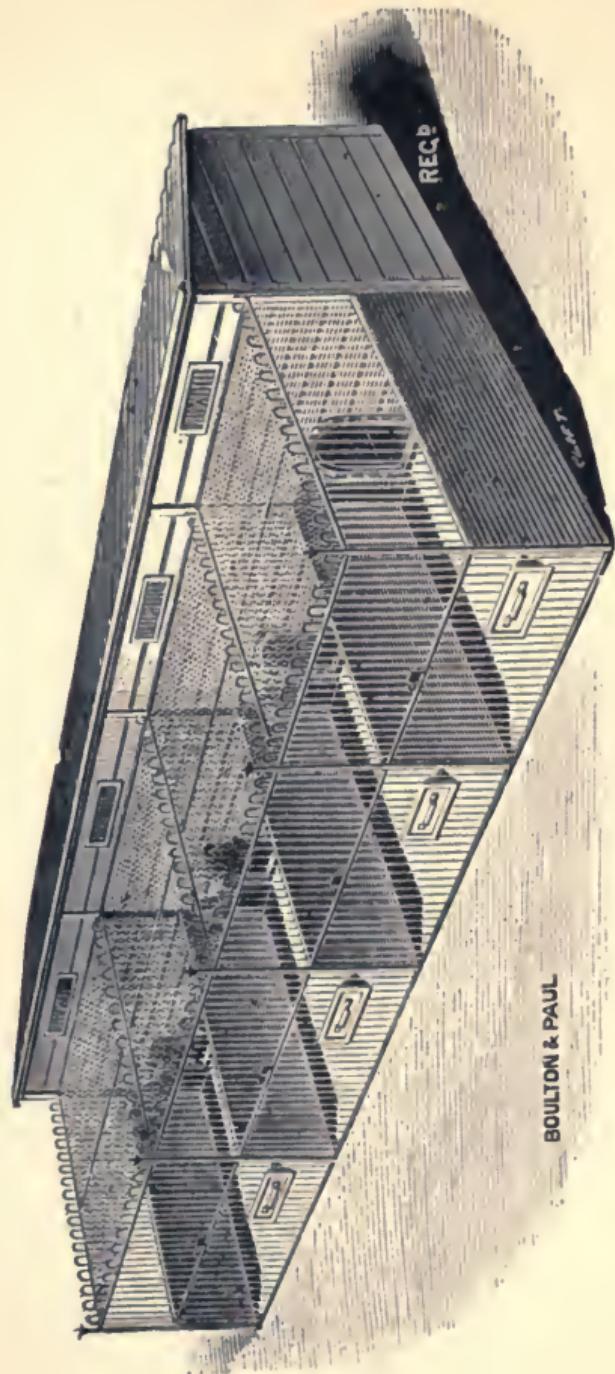


FIG. 16.

BOULTON & PAUL

compartments, whether in yards, courts, hutches, or boxes, should always be fixed with a movable slide door, which can easily be shut or opened at will. The advantage of this will be found by any one who has had the slightest experience, and really requires no explanation. Fig. 16 shows a range of improved kennels with runs. These were built for terriers, but by applying the same alterations to them as suggested for Fig. 14 an excellent range of ferret courts and yards would result. The doors are arranged to open at the back and by lifting up the roofs, and the sleeping compartments are fitted throughout with sliding floors to facilitate cleaning. The inside view of these kennels is well depicted in Fig. 17, which clearly defines how the sliding floor is arranged. The measurement of each kennel is about 4 feet by 2 feet 9 inches. A very good drawing of a double kennel, with

covered-in courts, will be found in Fig. 18, which perhaps would run to more expense

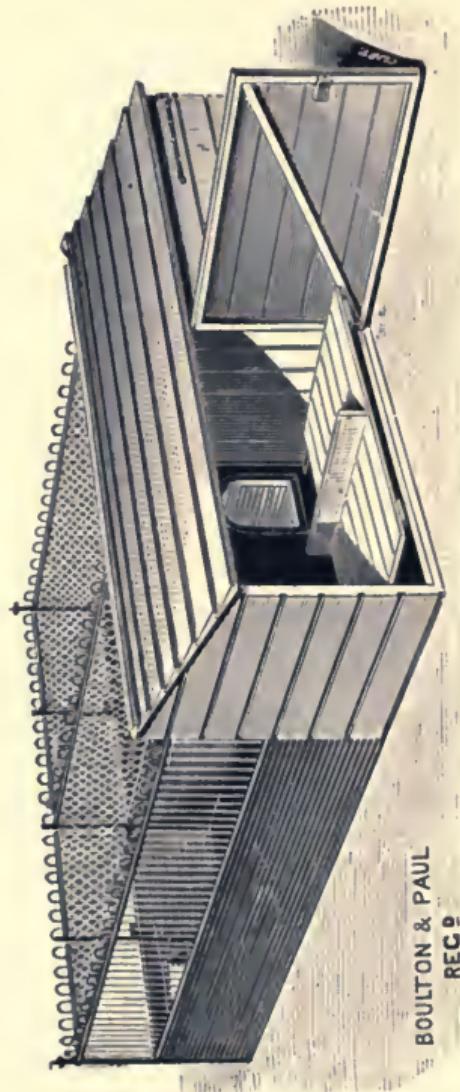


FIG. 17.

than the majority of ferret keepers would care to go. But it should be remembered

that it is the easiest thing in the world to convert a dog kennel into a ferret court, and the expense of so doing would be but a few shillings. In this case only a little fine wire netting would be

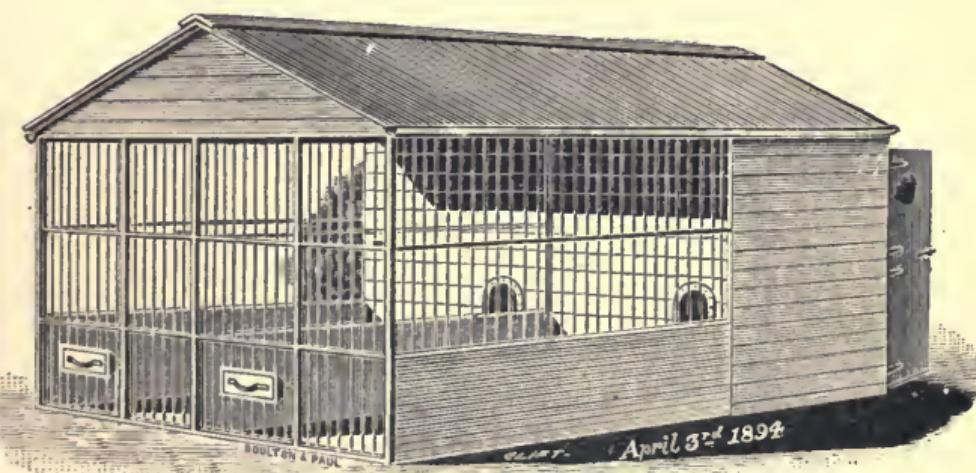


FIG. 18.

required to run round outside the courts, a new shutter to be placed in the inlet entrance (from the interior to the run), with a small hole and movable stop, and a sleeping box provided. Finally there is the fancy combination cote, Fig. 19. The author does not recommend it, but

simply gives it as one more example of the various hutches, kennels, yards, courts, or other ferret homes that are manufactured and in use. It has match-

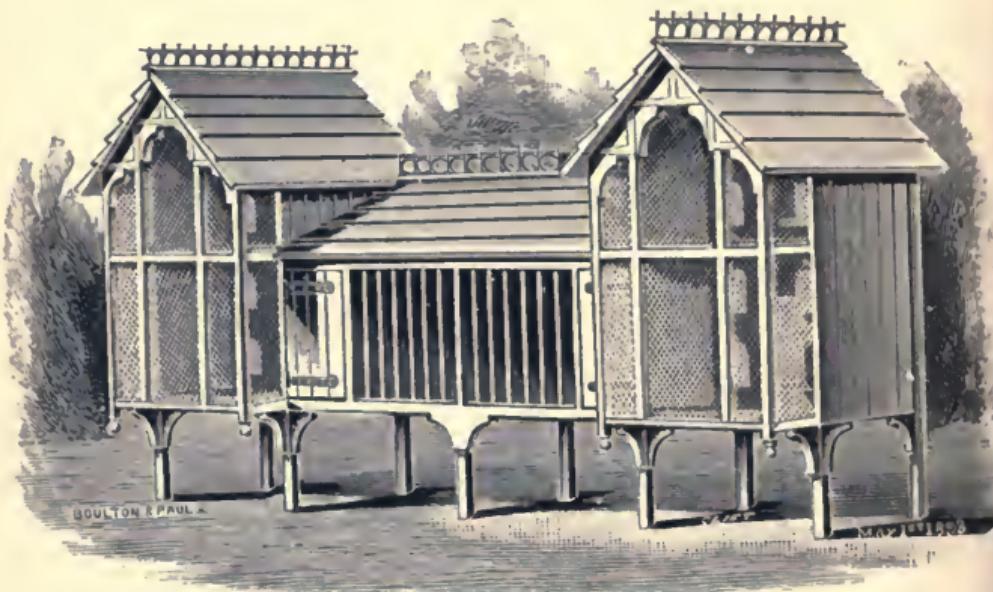


FIG. 19.

board sides, backs and divisions, weather-board roof, painted outside, whitened inside, wood frame and wire lattice front, wrought-iron bars, or netting, and floor raised one foot above the ground.

CHAPTER IV

Bedding and food—Ferrets attacking a baby—Breeding and management—Crossing—The “points” of a ferret—Gestation—Ferrets in early infancy.

THE secret of success in ferret keeping, as already mentioned, is cleanliness. Therefore one cannot be too particular in this respect, and the hutches and yards should be thoroughly cleaned out at regular intervals and as occasion requires.

It is advisable to whitewash the interior of the sleeping compartments and sprinkle the floor with pine sawdust and insect powder. Of the latter there are many kinds, one of the best being “Phenic Powder,” a disinfectant supplied by Messrs. Chamberlin and Smith, of Exchange Street, Norwich.

The bed should be composed of clean, dry straw, wheat, or perhaps oat straw will be found the better of the two.

The sides of the yards or day compartments may also be whitewashed, and the floor well covered with pine sawdust or fine peat-moss litter.

Ferrets habitually deposit their secretions in one particular spot ; as a rule, in the corner farthest away from their sleeping compartment, and in case another spot is likely to be selected by them, it is advisable, when placing ferrets into a new hutch, to first deposit a small portion of their dung in the place most convenient to clean, and in the corner mentioned, when it will be found they will, as a rule, continue to use the spot selected for them.

When in young the jills require blood, and unless this is given to them, they will most probably eat their offspring. To illustrate the ferocity of these little

animals and their thirst for blood when in this state, an instance may be quoted in which it is on record that they were known to have attacked a baby that by some means or other had been carelessly left unattended in a place to which they had access.

Part of a cat's carcase is often given to them, and is good food as a change from rats, birds, fowls, ducks' necks, and such like. When not at work, bread and milk form their staple diet. It is not advisable to give them new bread, and the best way to prepare the food is to first soak the bread in water, take it out and squeeze with the hand all the water from the bread, then crumble it into a feeding pan, and pour the milk over it, giving it at once to the ferrets. Feed always at the same time, and twice daily will be found sufficient, although many people believe in three times. Oatmeal porridge is sometimes substituted for bread, but the

latter answers best, and flesh should not be given oftener than every three days. When referring to flesh diet, a word of warning may not be altogether out of place. Do not let your ferrets store their food in their beds, as they are very fond of doing. See that they have sufficient and that they eat well, but do not let them overgorge themselves. The bird or animal intended for them should be freshly killed, clean, and given with the blood in it. Rabbits and fowls' livers are also suitable food and greatly used, but *avoid giving them entrails.*

Young ferrets are fed on similar lines to the older ones, excepting perhaps they require feeding three times a day instead of twice, and it is advisable to give them less flesh diet than the others; also warm the milk slightly before pouring it over the bread. This latter remark applies equally to a jill which is in young. Some ferret keepers make it a practice to take

all the food away immediately after each meal. This may be a good rule to follow, but a little milk should be always left in the pans for the ferrets to drink when they are thirsty during the daytime.

When they are going to be worked the bread is omitted from their feeding pans, only milk being given to them, and this not in such a large proportion as they are accustomed to have it. Do not give them their milk immediately before starting, but two hours or an hour and a half before they are required. A small quantity of milk may also be given at mid-day, otherwise they may, when hot, tired, and thirsty from working, leave their quarry to search for water.

Always wash out the feeding pans before inserting the food, and make use of a peculiar whistle or cry when giving it, one of the reasons for which will be dealt with hereafter.

Although it is usual to feed a small

number of ferrets upon new milk fresh from the cow, it is by no means necessary to give this when a large number of animals have to be satisfied. In this case skim milk is generally used, to it being more often than otherwise added one third as much again of boiling water before it is mixed with the meal or bread.

Greaves also will be found excellent food for ferrets. The greaves are put into the feeding pans, and boiling water poured over them. The mixture is then worked up into the consistency of paste and given warm to the ferrets, which they soon become very fond of. Good greaves can be obtained from Messrs. Chamberlin and Smith, of Exchange Street, Norwich.

BREEDING AND MANAGEMENT

Among early authors it was a matter of doubt whether the ferret and the pole-

cat were of different species, and Gilbert White went so far as to assert that there were two species of ferrets. The accuracy of this statement may be doubted; one could hardly classify the pure-bred and



FIG. 20.—Pure-bred Ferret.

The property of Mr. Charles Wood, of Harleston, Norfolk.

cross-bred ferrets (which in many respects differ considerably) as two species. It is generally noticeable that the female is smaller than the male, which fact also applies to stoats and weasels. As soon as one ascertains a jill, or female ferret, is

on heat, she must be at once removed to a separate hutch or kennel. This generally happens in the months of April, May,



FIG. 21.—White Ferret.

The property of Mr. Charles Wood, of Harleston, Norfolk.

or July, ferrets as a rule breeding twice a year.

Concerning the all-important question of blood, or pedigree, practical and long experience will best answer the question. Some advocate pure blood only; others the reverse. Some advocate breeding

large ferrets, others medium, and others again small. Each have their own arguments, and, after all said and done, hold to their own convictions. This maxim, however, appears to be accepted: Let your prime object be to produce a healthy strain of good strong workers.

As to size, a debatable point arises, and much could be written upon the advantages and disadvantages of large, medium, or small-sized ferrets. It is a mistake to argue that a larger ferret will work better than a medium or small one, and *vice-versâ*; also, that large ferrets are best for rabbits, and small ferrets for rats. Both arguments are equally fallacious. Ferrets are at all times animals of varying dispositions, and unless their food, lodging, and comfort are studied, results will not always be satisfactory. In breeding, the generality of ferret keepers prefer to produce the medium size to any others.

CROSSING

To cross between a pure-bred ferret and a dog polecat ferret, one would be



FIG. 22.—First Cross—From a Wild Polecat.

The property of Mr. Charles Wood, of Harleston, Norfolk.

guided in a great measure by the respective sizes of the dog and jill. Polecat ferrets as a rule produce large-sized progeny, but if the jill be small and the dog not over large, a happy medium will be the result. In using polecat dog

ferrets it is argued, and apparently with good reason, that the young are more fierce, lively, and better workers than the pure-bred white ferrets. This may be so, but each have their advantages. There



FIG. 23.—Second Cross—From a Polecat-Ferret.

The property of Mr. Charles Wood, of Harleston, Norfolk.

is a slow, methodical, business-like way about the small white ferret with pink eyes which attracts one and lends a partiality for that breed, especially when required for rabbits. And if the polecat cross are quicker, more ferocious, and

have more dash, they are not so docile to handle (in many cases a great consideration), and are more inclined to lay up or more quickly tire out.

THE "POINTS" OF A FERRET

In selecting the dog ferret, after having considered its antecedent repute for health and stamina, we should take note of its points and general appearance. Its body should be slim, lengthy, and muscular, its legs and feet sound and strong, its face sharp, fur clean, glossy, and thick, and it should be quick in movement. A stumpy, large-headed, dull-looking animal should not be used for breeding purposes; nor should any ferret that is not in the soundest health and condition. A periodical mixture of blood is not only to be encouraged, but is essential to success, and practical experiment will do more to teach the uninitiated than all the books and articles ever written.

GESTATION

The dog ferret selected, let him be placed with the jill at least twice during a period of three days. Some keepers allow the two to be together for three or four days, but this is hardly advisable. The period of gestation lasts from forty-two to forty-five days, and the young average from six to ten in number. During gestation the jill may be used for working if required, but not within three weeks of her time. She should then be placed in a separate hutch, well fed, and carefully looked after. When thirty-seven or thirty-eight days have expired, her sleeping compartment should be thoroughly cleaned out, a fresh bed made, and the compartment closed up for the next month. Some people say that a fortnight from the allotted time is quite sufficient to keep the compartment closed, but it is better to err (if err at all) on the right

side rather than the wrong, and we would advise a month. If the young are looked at during this time the jill will most probably destroy them. Whilst she is in young, feed her well with warm bread and milk, giving flesh food once daily, but do not let her take the latter into the sleeping compartment.

FERRETS IN EARLY INFANCY

Three weeks after birth the young may be looked at. This can best be done when the jill is feeding outside. Fresh straw may be given them at this time, but when doing so allow the old straw to remain, nor should it be removed until the young ones are sufficiently large to come out and feed with their mother. When three months old the young may be removed to a separate hutch, where it is as well to keep them a month before mixing them with others. When they

first begin to come out to feed with their mother, feed them three times a day, or even four. They will not then pull the jill down so much, and she will be ready all the sooner to rear and nurture them better. If the jill is in young the first week in May, another litter may be expected by the first week in September.

Watch the young ones carefully when they first begin to come outside—it is the most dangerous period of their existence. They are more apt to be lost than at any other time. If one of their number be taken ill, looks melancholy, draggled or weakly, it must be instantly removed to a clean, warm hutch by itself. It can be there better looked after, dosed with medicine if occasion requires, and it will not communicate its ailment to the others. When three months old the young may be transferred from the hutches to the yards or courts, or training hutches, in accordance with the views of their owners.

CHAPTER V

Ailments and diseases—Distemper—Insects—Diseases of the foot—Skin diseases : red mange or blotch—Worms—Rat-bites.

AILMENTS AND DISEASES

Delicate by nature, delicate to handle, delicate in their physical capacities. Such a description aptly applies to the objects of our attention. Ferrets are indeed delicate creatures, and those who imagine they will be able to keep them for any length of time, without their escaping the ills that flesh is heir to, will find themselves very much mistaken. But at any time prevention is better than cure, and if ferrets are well looked after, and hutches are thoroughly cleaned

at frequent intervals, disease may in a great measure be avoided.

DISTEMPER

When young, ferrets are very liable to the "sweats," or, in more polite parlance, distemper. This disease is apparently a specific fever, the result of poison in the blood, so therefore, although it can be hoped in some measure to mitigate the sufferings and to shorten the period of the attacks by careful treatment, it should be remembered that the disease must run its course, and the advertised nostrums of the certain cure in a few hours will be wisely avoided. Very often a cold which a ferret has contracted is thought to be a case of distemper, and the older the ferret the milder, as a rule, is the attack. A cold or a very mild attack of distemper can generally be cured by simply placing the afflicted animal in a fresh, clean,

warm hutch, and by feeding it up, well and often, with good and warm food. Ordinary distemper first makes itself apparent by the following symptoms :— Gradual loss of appetite, general dulness, gliding gradually into a state of fever, with hot nose, thirst, and constipation. The nose and eyes commence running clear water at first, but afterwards this becomes purulent. The heat of the skin is more and more apparent, especially inside the thighs, and the ferret is emaciated and prostrate.

Often the unfortunate animal is attacked with a complication which affects the head, chest, or stomach, and it must be treated accordingly. But to put much into a few words, in very severe cases it is generally better for all concerned, and more humane, to at once put the afflicted little beasts out of their misery, than to attempt to prolong their sufferings by treatments which frequently fail, whilst

the contagion gains ground and spreads to others.

In order the better to understand the cure we will imagine a ferret is afflicted. Should it be an ordinary case of distemper, we first prepare a clean, dry, airy hutch, which is warm and free from draught. This hutch, having been prepared as before described (under the head of "Breeding and Management") is ready for use. The ferret is then bathed in warm water—not too warm—in which has been diluted some Condy's Fluid (about a teaspoonful to a pint of water). It is afterwards carefully rubbed dry, wrapped in warm flannel, and deposited in the hutch. See that all matter and pus is carefully washed from the eyes and nose, and if the case is a bad one the bathing of these organs may be repeated later in the day, and a little cold cream or vaseline applied afterwards. Feed at first sparingly and with the best, warm,

fresh milk (with the cream on), arrow-root, eggs and milk beaten up, milk, and beef tea. As the animal gets better, give food oftener, gradually making it more and more substantial, not much at a time, but little and often.

Cod-liver oil is another remedy often advocated, but many ferrets are put backward more than they are benefited by its use. This may be accounted for in two ways: Firstly, the cod-liver oil is given to them before the stomach is in a fit state to bear it; secondly, the doses administered are too large. If given a few drops at a time, and certainly not more than once a day, it will be found to be of material assistance.

Keep the sufferer absolutely quiet and away from any possible excitement; if constipated, give a few drops of castor oil; if the reverse be noticeable, a little laudanum may be added to the cod-liver or castor oil which is being administered.

Should the head be afflicted as well, the disease becomes more complicated, and the hopes of a successful cure are not so great. The treatment is similar to that mentioned above, and one must trust to beef tea, milk, cream mixed with yolk of eggs and a little port wine to pull through ; the medicine in all cases being subservient to good nursing and careful, cleanly management.

If the stomach is affected, with or without distemper, it is easy to pick out the animal suffering from the complaint. Its face is pinched and miserable looking ; it is evidently in pain, as is evidenced by its short, sharp cries ; its back is arched, as if to relieve the muscles of its stomach, and its tail is generally trailing along the ground in a lifeless kind of manner, looking unnatural. Moreover, it avoids the others and lies down by itself in seclusion. When handled a local tenderness will be noticed. The best treatment is to keep

as quiet as possible, giving small doses of laudanum to relieve the pain, and feed as mentioned above.

When the chest is affected, the treatment is similar, only the ferrets must be watched more closely, and when a change from high fever to debility is noticed, one should endeavour to counteract it by diet.

A friendly correspondent, who handles at least 500 ferrets per annum, sent the following letter to the author as this book was on the point of going to press :—

“ Some few years ago a friend of mine, keeping something like a dozen ferrets, had an outbreak of that ferret scourge, distemper, amongst them. When all but one were dead, he called me to look at the survivor. It was in a sad condition, with eyes and nose completely clogged with thick mucous discharge, and scarcely able to stand. Seeing there was no water in the hutch, I asked why that was. He replied, ‘ They were so ravenous to drink, that I was afraid to keep too much water with them, for fear it might injure them.’ I said,

'Well, the ferret can but die; let it have as much cold water as it will drink.' After cleansing its skin and providing the animal with a clean hutch, we gave it all the cold water it would drink, and we were astonished at the quantity it drank for a day or two; at last it began to eat a little food, and from that time it gradually recovered, and was eventually as well and healthy as possible."

INSECTS

Always examine your ferrets closely from time to time; once a week will not be too often. If insects are discovered, use Messrs. Chamberlin and Smith's phenic powder freely, inside as well as outside the hutches, and by rubbing it into the animals' coats. In bad cases bathe the ferrets in a solution of quassia wood, which any chemist will supply you with; about an ounce of chips to a gallon of water. Sometimes a large tick will be found on the head and neck

of ferrets, which can only be dislodged with difficulty. It should be picked off and the animal treated as above mentioned.

Warm weather, a hot, foul hutch, and filth are generally the causes of the presence of these obnoxious little visitors, and such a state of circumstances assists them to multiply alarmingly in an incredibly short space of time. They are a much greater nuisance than would be supposed, and from their constant biting and the irritation they cause they render ferrets nervous, excitable, and difficult to handle. They interrupt sleep, appetite, and often pave the way for disease. By constant biting and scratching, in vain endeavours to rid themselves of these pests, ferrets disfigure their skin, and often bring about sores which are liable to be mistaken for diseased skin, and wrongly treated. If these sores are found, dress them with a little cart grease, vaseline, or lard. Sometimes

the ferrets' coats are soaked with olive oil or warm castor oil, but in this treatment care must be taken the animal does not catch cold, and the oil should be washed off the coat within twelve hours.

Other treatments recommended are oil of aniseed mixed with common oil, carbolic acid and nicotine, corrosive sublimate, turps, sulphuret of calcium. These should all be used with caution, but the simpler remedies of quassia and insect powder will generally be found sufficiently effective for the purpose.

Keating's powder, which consists of the pulverised flowers of *Pyrethrum roseum*, is also advocated, but it will be found more expensive than phenic powder, and not more effective. Either can be rubbed into the coat with the hand, or blown in by means of an india-rubber puff-ball. After doing this it is advisable to wash the animal every morning, and give clean straw in the hutches, adding plenty of

sweet pine sawdust besprinkled with the insect powder.

The ticks alluded to belong to the section *Ixodes* of the family *Acarida*; after their removal treat the animal as above described as for the more serious cases. Lice may be treated similarly to fleas.

DISEASES OF THE FOOT

Keep your ferrets' toe-nails short, and it will not be found a disadvantageous plan to dip their feet once every fourteen days in turpentine to keep them clean. Foot-rot is one of the worst diseases ferrets are subject to, and almost invariably arises from want of cleanliness. A simple preventative is to always wash their feet after working. The symptoms of this complaint are very apparent; they are the same as severe inflammation and, if unattended, lead to ulcers and sores,

which are sometimes so severe that the root of the tail becomes affected.

The treatment is simple. Clean the hutch well, and sprinkle a plentiful supply of pine sawdust about the floor. Bathe the feet in water in which about two or three pennyworth of permanganate of potash has been dissolved. Dress with a weak solution of carbolic acid and water, and in very severe cases it may be found necessary to poultice, wrapping the feet in rags wetted with the solution last named, or with a solution of chloride of zinc. An occasional run in long grass is good for them, and helps to keep their feet in good condition. Should ulcerations appear, or the toe-nails drop off or have to be removed, the aid of astringent lotions must be resorted to, and the diseased places now and again touched with a solution of nitrate of silver, or a little blue ointment, the feet of course being encased in rag.

SKIN DISEASES

A little sulphur mixed in the straw of the sleeping compartment is not a bad preventative of red mange or blotch. This disease is closely allied to eczema, if indeed it is not the same. Ferrets are more liable to it when weakened by distemper than at any other time, and it is occasioned by sudden alterations of temperature, foul hutches, filth, and other causes. The symptoms are itch, redness, or inflammation of the skin, especially upon the sides, the rump, and the back, small sores and scabs, discharging pus and matter causing the fur to become damp and matted together in lumps and patches. A part of the body is sometimes covered with small dry scales, and the hair falls off. Not only is the chest, back, and legs affected, but the lips, the eyes, and the ears often present a swollen

appearance, and in the severer cases become quite closed up.

The treatment is best commenced with moderate doses of opening medicine. Occasionally wash the ferret with luke-warm water and a little disinfectant soap, taking care to dry it well afterwards, and anoint the affected parts with mild lotions of lead, zinc, alum, or a weak solution of nitrate of silver, or carbonate of soda.

WORMS

Why ferrets should be troubled with this complaint often causes wonder, but the fact remains that it is more often than otherwise encountered by every ferret keeper who has had any experience. Symptoms need not be searched for, as the obnoxious pests make their presence apparent, sooner perhaps than any other disease to which ferrets are subject.

For treatment use butter balls, con-

taining freshly-grated areca nut, kamala, or pure santonine, giving a small dose of castor oil the day before this medicine is administered. Let the ferret fast for twelve hours, so that the stomach and intestines are quite empty, then give the anthalmintic medicine, followed by a few drops of castor oil, or cod-liver oil about an hour afterwards.

As soon as the ferret is clear of worms, feed it up well, in order to get it into its naturally strong and healthy condition.

RAT-BITES

Various are the cures advocated for rat-bites, which have to be treated oftener than any other ailment.

Old rat-catchers almost all use turpentine, which, though somewhat painful, is certainly effective.

The more modern school of ferret keepers apply pure carbolic acid to the

wounds by means of a small piece of clean wood, being careful to avoid excessive dressing.

Other remedies are sweet oil, carbolic oil, and a herbal ointment advertised by Mr. George Reader, of 6 Chamber Coombs Terrace, Ilfracombe, Devon.

Rat-bites, if not attended to at once, are wont to result in blood poisoning, which often causes the death of the ferret bitten, acute tuberculosis commonly supervening at a variable date after the bite. An antiseptic remedy is, therefore, indicated, and the sooner it is applied the better is the chance of success.

CHAPTER VI

MUZZLING AND COPING

THIS subject has been selected before “Handling and Working” because, when dealing with the latter, references may arise which make it essential that muzzling and coping should be properly understood.

Working ferrets to rabbits, and training them to that branch of sport, for which they are in most request, is next to an impossibility unless muzzling and coping are thoroughly understood, both theoretically and practically.

Muzzles are few in number, and in the author’s opinion they are more disadvantageous to successful results than otherwise. It is an undeniable fact that no

ferret will work as well with a muzzle as it will when coped, and the reason will be apparent when the reader has considered the various devices placed before him.

Muzzle No. 1 is a combination which

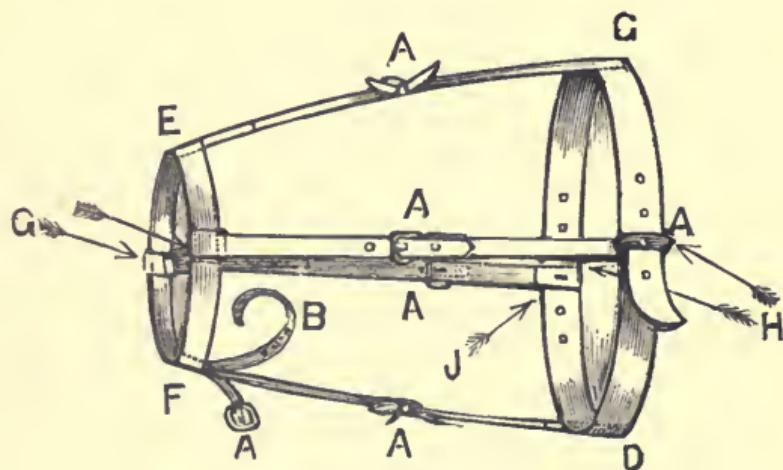


FIG. 24.—Muzzle No. 1.

can be used in several ways, and in order to explain, lettering has been added to the diagram. C D is the collar, which fastens round the neck of the ferret by the assistance of the buckle A. E F is the nose band or jaw muzzle, which prevents the ferret from biting or opening its mouth. E C, F D, G H, G H are distance

straps, which can be lengthened or shortened at will by means of the buckles at A. F B A is a mouth strap.

It is not really necessary to have four distance straps, and many people use muzzles with only two, those most in favour being E C and F D. Nor is it usual to have the buckles A upon these distance straps, as they increase the weight and add a clumsiness to the muzzle.

It is customary to have the distance straps plain, of very thin leather, two in number, and without the buckle permanently sewn to the straps or bands at E, G, G, F, C and D, and loose round the collar at H and H, although they are fixed sometimes there by means of the buckle A, or by a small piece of stiff wire, as shown at J.

The idea of having tiny buckles upon these distance straps A is apparent, and should hardly need explanation. The

chief object of this invention is to provide a muzzle which can be fitted to any ferret, large or small.

The mouth strap F B A is another addition to the ordinary muzzle of this class, and can be used or not, just as desired. The small strap, which is as thin and narrow as it is possible to make it, is passed behind the canines in the ferret's mouth and fastened beneath the jaw on the buckle A. Thin ends of a whipcord strand are more often used for this in preference to a strap, which in reality can scarcely be made small and thin enough.

It is rarely that one of these combination muzzles is met with, and it is doubtful whether the reader is ever likely to see one unless he has one made; but the author desires to place everything within his knowledge before the reader, and leave him to exercise his own choice in selection. Muzzle No. 2 is another almost obsolete contrivance which has found

but little favour with ferret owners, and no one who looks at it or tries it will wonder thereat. It consists of a leather strap and buckle, which can be taken up tight or loose round the ferret's neck, as with the collar strap in Muzzle No. 1.

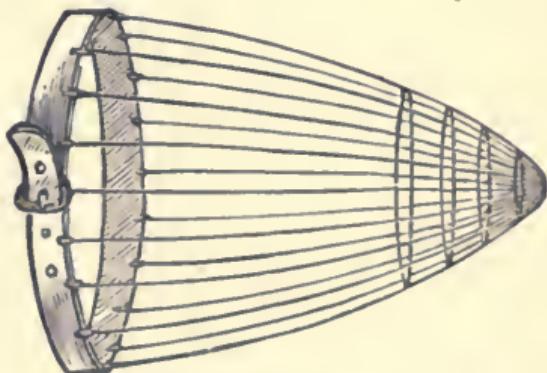


FIG. 25.—Muzzle No. 2.

Attached to the forward edge of this strap is a wire cagework, as shown in the sketch. The end of the cagework is narrowed near where the nose of the ferret would come, and interwoven with other strands, but these are not extended beyond, or quite as far as, where the ferret's eye would be. The result is a secure muzzle, and the

wire being pliable does not at all affect the elasticity of the collar strap.

In theory the invention looks a good one, but the inventor has ignored the practical reasoning which would arise in the minds of those accustomed to working muzzled or coped ferrets. Immediately a ferret nears a rabbit or a rat, nature impels it to rush forward and attempt to insert its teeth in some vital part. But when its head is encased in a wire basket of this description, what happens? Why, the wirework is forced back upon the unfortunate ferret's nose, as the collar strap, although not permitting the muzzle to come forward, does not prevent its running a little backward, sufficiently to press the nose of the unlucky wearer. A few trials of this kind are sufficient for the ferret; he loses his dash, injures his nose and face trying to displace the head-gear, refuses to work or gets sulky and lays up. *Verbum sap.*

Muzzle No. 3 is an invention which furnishes another instance of more importance being attached to theory rather than to practice.

Several of these muzzles were given to the author to experiment with (and report

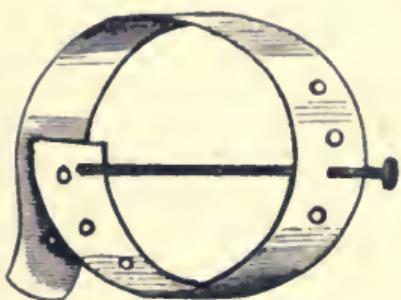


FIG. 26.—Muzzle No. 3.

thereon), which he did, at the time, in company with an old and experienced keeper, who had managed ferrets for sixty years and upwards. It was the old story over again. Muzzles will not do when copies can be used and obtained.

As shown by the drawing, the muzzle consists of a band made from brass or aluminium, punctured at intervals to allow a small screw rod of the same material to be screwed tightly therein. The band is passed over the ferret's nose and the rod run through one side of it

behind the animal's canine teeth, being screwed in on the other side to keep it in place. The rod is made to fit exactly, so that it does not protrude at either end; therefore, to use these muzzles, they must

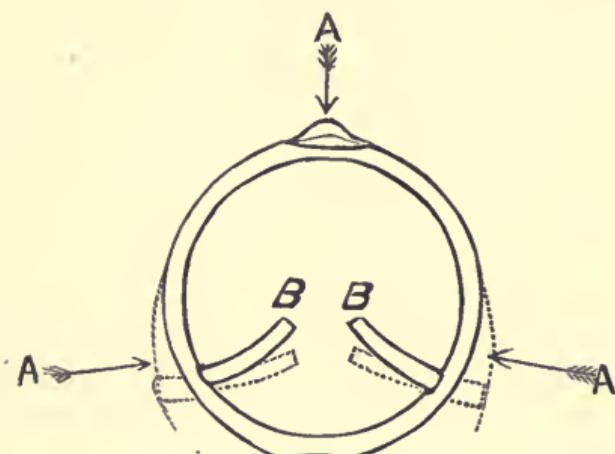


FIG. 27.—Muzzle No. 4.

be obtained in different sizes, because one muzzle may fit one ferret and not another.

An improvement will be found in Muzzle No. 4, which it is believed is a patent, although the sample before us and the ones we have tried in years gone by are not marked as such. The rough sketch accompanying is almost self explanatory. A A A represents a strong

spring, similar to part of a mainspring of a watch. To the ends of this spring are riveted two small spikes, made of French nail wire or similar material, and this is clipped on to the brass ring or large eyelet, which is all the muzzle consists of, and is a great improvement upon the one last described. It will be found to fit nearly any ferret.

The dotted lines indicate the muzzle with the spring pressed down, as would be done when fixing it upon the ferret's nose.

However, all said and done, keepers and workers of ferrets have a universal antipathy to muzzles of all descriptions. They never recommend them, nor would the author.

COPING

Coping is much more satisfactory to the worker of ferrets than any attempt at muzzling. Coped ferrets will work and

work well—in fact, coping does not seem to affect them at all, and a coped ferret will face a rat and drive him out of his lair, in spite of the fact that his mouth is securely fastened, and the ferret must feel that he is placed at a great disadvantage.

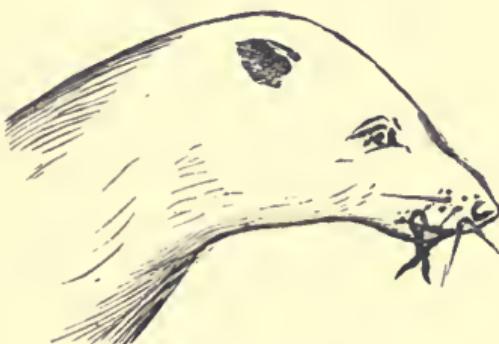


FIG. 28.—Cope No. 1.

In coping, the material used is usually either thread, string, or whipcord.

The old method, represented in Cope No. 1, will probably be condemned on the score of cruelty, yet there is really no more cruelty in employing it than there is in piercing ears, and certainly not so much as in ringing bulls or pigs. This method consists in sewing up the mouth

of the ferret. When first practised on a young animal it is certainly not a pleasant operation for the ferret. The upper lip is pierced with a large needle, as shown in the sketch, a strong piece of thread is run through on each side, and the ends tied in a knot under the jaw. The ferret is thus securely coped.

It may at first appear cruel, but after the first time or two there is no cruelty whatever, as the pierced holes remain permanently open as in a lady's ears. The thread can be passed through them whenever required, and the ferret may be coped without further pain or inconvenience. The old school of ferret workers are much in favour of this method, and allege as an advantage that if a ferret so coped be lost, the saliva from the animal's mouth will, in two or three days at the most, rot the thread and free the jaws, thus preventing the animal dying from starvation, which is always a risk when any

other form of coping or muzzling is adopted.

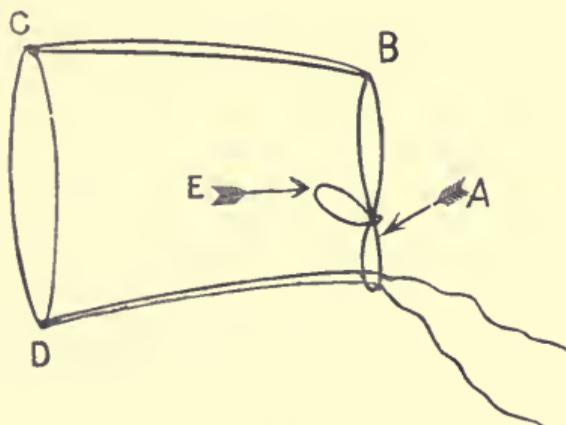


FIG. 29.—Cope No. 2.

Cope No. 2 is shown in three diagrams. Fig. 29 (without being knotted at loop D) shows the cope as tied and ready for use; Fig. 30 an end-on view of the same cope, showing all the loops; Fig. 31 the cope placed in position on the head of the ferret, ready to be permanently fixed by tying the ends at loop A.

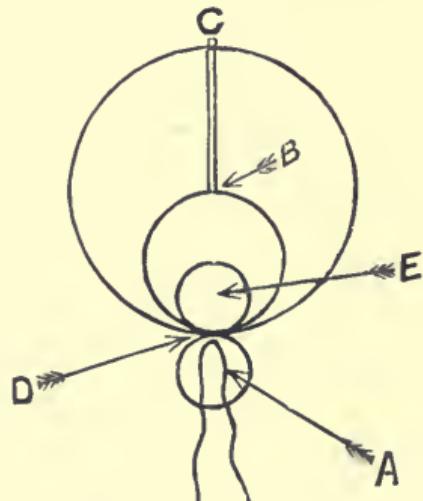


FIG. 30.—Cope No. 2.

The material most in favour for this method of coping is twine, or a strand of whipecord. The length must be judged in accordance with the cope intended to be used and the size of the ferret. Some prefer strong or twisted thread, but this

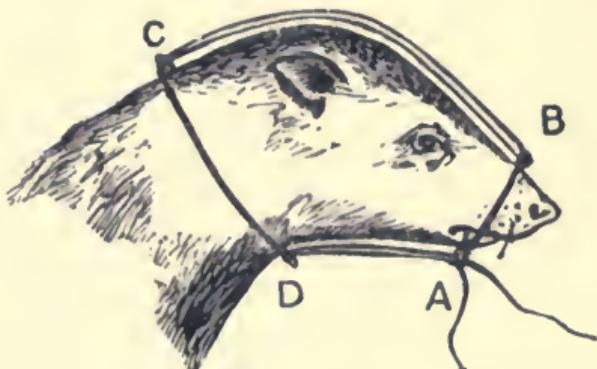


FIG. 31.—Cope No. 2.

in our opinion often cuts the ferrets and is not so comfortable to work with as a thin strand of whipecord. Loop A is not a necessity, and is as often as not omitted. Loop E goes round the under jaw, and is held in position by being slipped behind the canine teeth. Loop B goes over the nose, as shown in Fig. 31, and the two ends are carried straight up over the

middle of the forehead to C, where they are knotted and carried round the neck to D. Here the ends are sometimes tied, and the cope is complete. But it is often practical to knot at D and carry the ends on to A, either fastening them at the bottom of loop E, or to loop A, which, when used, is made on purpose for knotting the ends, and so keeping the cope more permanently fixed to the ferret's head.

Fig. 30 shows the same cope, only it is represented by an end-on view. Loop A is the loop under the lower jaw for the purpose of fixing the loose end. Loop E goes round the lower jaw and behind the canine teeth; loop B round the nose; B to C the double lines carried up the forehead; loop C D round the neck, and the two loose ends are brought down underneath to be fastened to loop A.

Fig. 31 illustrates the ferret's head with the cope attached. Naturally, the

cope is not, when fixed, so loosely placed upon the ferret as is here depicted, and were it illustrated as it is used in practice the reader would not be able to obtain much idea from the illustration. When in use the string is fixed securely and tight to the ferret's head, but not uncomfortably so, and the knots should be simple and secure. It is often argued that, by continuing the ends of the cope from D to A, and by using the A loop, the cope is more complicated, and the ferret is more likely to free himself with his claws by scratching than if the cope be completed by fastening at D. But the pros and cons seem equal, and the one method finds quite as many adherents as the other.

A still further method is sometimes used. Two loops are taken over the ferret's nose, with and without the canine tooth loop, the double line straight up the forehead and fastened round the neck.

The author has not given this cope a very good trial, as he has no faith in it, and on every occasion when he has experimented with it the ferrets have almost invariably freed their jaws in a short space of time. Besides, it is neither so simple, secure, nor effective as the other methods he has endeavoured to explain. Another cope not very different may be explained by reference to the sketch of Cope No. 2—Fig. 31. A piece of good twine is taken, doubled, and a small loop made at the doubled end. This small loop is placed on the ferret's throat at D, and the twine is taken round the neck and knotted at C. The collar is then twisted round, so that the small loop is placed at C and the long ends hang from D. These ends are then taken to A, knotted, and continued round the jaws to B, where they are again knotted (thus completely closing the ferret's mouth and muzzling him), then taken up over the forehead together to C,

where they are fastened to the small loop first mentioned, and the cope is complete. In this method it will be noticed there is no "bit piece" or loop to go in the ferret's mouth under the tongue and at the back of the canine teeth, and the fastening knots or endings of the loose ends are all on the top of the head instead of being under the chin. This cope has its advantages, and is one of those which finds high favour amongst ferret workers.

CHAPTER VII

Handling and working—Misplaced confidence in young ferrets—Ferret suckling and rearing rats—Working to rabbits—How to cause a ferret to forego its hold—Working to rats—Ferret *v.* rat in a scalding-tub—Farm-boys taking rats alive in their hands—An eccentric rat-catcher—How to handle laid-up ferrets—The warrener's telephone—The line ferret.

HANDLING AND WORKING

As soon as young ferrets appear in the exercise compartments of their hutches, they should be handled. At first, when this is attempted, they will resent all overtures by arching their backs and hissing at the intruder, but no hesitation should be shown, and the hand should be brought forward quickly and firmly,

picking up the ferret by the neck, just behind the ears. Handle them very gently, and stroke them, to show that no harm is meant, and to establish their confidence. When two months or ten weeks old, they should be taken out, carried about, set down, allowed to run short distances, and picked up again; and the offer of an occasional *bonne bouche* will not be amiss in establishing a good feeling between trainer and trained.

One old gentleman living in Norfolk had a great penchant for training young ferrets. On a Sunday afternoon he might often be seen reclining in a shady spot on his lawn with half-a-dozen or more young ferrets running all round him, and he would encourage them to run over his body as well. When last heard of he was not quite so enthusiastic on this latter practice. On close inquiry it was ascertained that one young ferret, more attentive than the others, had taken a sudden

affection for his ear, the lobe of which it had nearly bitten off, hence the temporary coldness between our friend and his pets.

In handling ferrets, the operator must be firm, gentle, and prompt. The hands should not be poked at the ferret, nor put out and quickly drawn back again, as is the case with one who is nervous of being bitten. Ferrets rarely attempt to bite any one who is known to them, and in the majority of cases when one is bitten it is almost always his own fault.

Have ferrets ever suckled rats? is a question which has often been put, but never appears to have been answered in the affirmative. On the 2nd of September 1895, Mr. H. Lane, writing from Wednesfield, says: "You say that ferrets when quite young will attack a live rat. It may interest you to hear that I know of a remarkable exception to that rule. One of my workmen had a white bitch ferret with eight young ones. When the young

ones were about three weeks old, the owner put into the hutch one night six young rats, about the same size as the ferrets, thinking to find them all dead next morning. What was his surprise to find, when he went to clean the hutch on the following day, both rats and ferrets running about together? He then took five of the rats away, leaving one. The old ferret suckled it and reared it like its own. The rat was very wild, and the old ferret would sometimes pick it up and carry it to the bed. After the young ones were weaned, the rat and the old ferret were still left together, and were the best of friends, sleeping side by side. It was a remarkable thing that while they were living together the ferret was taken out ratting continually, and would kill a strange rat immediately one was put in the hutch. My man kept them together for six months, but happening to leave the hutch door open one night, the rat

made its escape. Hundreds of people came to see the animals living together, and offers to purchase the pair were made by showmen and others. I saw them many times myself, but the rat never seemed to lose its natural wildness, and would burrow under the straw as soon as any one disturbed it. I do not know if you ever heard of a similar case before, but I should think such an instance as I have recorded would be very rare."

WORKING TO RABBITS

In training ferrets it is advisable to work them at first, free and unhampered by muzzle or cope, and it will be found best to use the mother of the litter to initiate them in the early stages of their education. Having well handled them for some time, and accustomed them to be caught without trouble, they should be put into a ferret working-box with their

mother, and taken to a park, field, or wood, where there are some short, dry sandy burrows, in which rabbits are likely to be found. If they refuse at first to follow their mother down the hole, put a line on her and only allow her to go in a little way, drawing her back again quickly, and she will thus act as a good decoy, and the young ones will soon learn to follow her down.

By all means let them kill their first rabbit if you can so arrange it; it will blood them, and make them keener. Do not work them too much at first, and run them into play holes where they are not likely to find anything, as well as the short burrows where they will; this will teach them to be persevering. On the other hand, encourage them by showing them their quarry at frequent intervals: not the dead rabbits you may have secured, but by putting the ferrets into burrows, which are a sure draw; and do not con-

WAITING FOR A BOLT.



stantly run them into old or disused holes, where they may roam a long time without scenting rabbits.

When the young ferret appears on the surface, pick it up at once, stroke it, and, if it appears keen on work and not tired, place it in the entrance of another part of the same burrow, and let it hunt a second time.

Should it "lay up" or not come out for some time, run a line-ferret into the hole, and dig it out without delay. This is one of the cogent reasons why young ferrets should at first be worked only in the short sandy holes, where they are easy to extract with the spade should they show an inclination to remain, instead of returning to the entrance of the burrow after they have ransacked its windings, or killed the rabbit which they have found therein. A quarter-of-an-hour is a good grace-limit to give them, and they should on no account be allowed longer.

Should you shoot the rabbit that is bolted, or your dog catch it, be sure and peg it near the bolt hole, so that the young ferret on emerging will find it there. Allow the ferret to worry it for a short space of time, and then take the rabbit away. The reason for pegging it down (which is easily accomplished by hurdling the rabbit) is that often a rabbit is laid carelessly down outside the bolt hole, whilst the person who laid it there has gone away to look after something else, only to find on his return that the ferret has, in the meanwhile, drawn the rabbit deep down into the hole, made a meal off it, and laid up, giving the thoughtless owner some hours of labour before he has been able to unearth them both.

With young ferrets nets are more often used, and this method appears without doubt to be best, as greater time can be bestowed upon one's charges, and one's attention can be given better without

having to stand at a distance from the bolt holes, or through being distracted by other things.

A little wrinkle which is not generally known is a simple plan for compelling a ferret to forego its hold upon its quarry, which is often to the uninitiated a most difficult task to accomplish. It is as follows :—Take the ferret up by the neck in the ordinary manner with one hand, holding the quarry in the other, and bring the thumb round over the forehead of the ferret to a point just above the eyes, causing a gradual pressure to be brought upon the part indicated. The effect will, or should be, instantaneous, and the ferret will quit its hold, when the pressure must be instantly stopped, and the ferret stroked.

When going ferreting for rabbits, always work your ferrets upwind, make as little noise as possible, do not run over the earths, but walk as silently as you can,

and, above all, do not let your dogs scratch at the entrance to the burrows, nor shout nor talk amongst yourselves. Take a little milk with you to give the ferrets if they are thirsty, as this may prevent them travelling in search of water when they ought to be attending to business, and do not work a ferret until it is tired out, but work them considerately, evenly, and giving them rest from time to time. When several ferrets have been in an earth and no rabbits have appeared, or they have bolted rabbits, and some time has elapsed without seeing others, the ferrets should be taken up as soon as they appear, otherwise one may "lay up," and induce the others to keep it company.

WORKING TO RATS

Young ferrets should not be worked to rats until they have had plenty of ex-

perience with rabbits, or until they are full grown, and quite capable of taking care of themselves. Little or no training will be found necessary, and they will, as a rule, fight to the death without requiring encouragement.

It is interesting sport to get a large scalding-tub, with a piece of netting over the top, placing a full-grown buck rat and a ferret in at the same time, and watch the fight. They will spar and feint like two experienced boxers. As a rule, the rat will be the first to show the white feather by an attempt to avoid meeting its adversary. The moment it does this the ferret has it by the throat like a flash of lightning, and the end is reached.

In working ferrets to rats only the most experienced and strongest should be used, or the ferrets may suffer more than the rats ; and in no case should the ferrets be muzzled or coped with a view to driving out the rats so that they may be

taken alive. Often a coped ferret emerges from a rabbit burrow in which there has been rats, fearfully mauled by having been attacked when it could not properly defend itself, and ferrets are, as a general rule, much too plucky to turn tail under any disadvantages.

When after rats, do not be sparing in the number of the ferrets used. Let the motto be, "The more the merrier." Unless brought to bay in a corner, from which retreat is difficult, rats will "start" with astonishing celerity—in many cases almost as soon as the ferret enters the hole. If one is shooting them he requires to be on the *qui vive* from the moment the ferret's tail disappears out of sight. When there are plenty of rats, and one has good ferrets, the sport is fast and furious, and it is difficult to find better fun with the aid of ferrets than a really good day's ratting.

Farm boys who are stimulated to wage

warfare against these pernicious rodents by the capitulation grant of one penny to twopence per tail become very clever at ratting, and, as is often said, "what they don't know ain't worth knowing." Many a time when the author has been rabbitting, and a rat has bolted, has he seen these boys catch it in their hands in the same manner that they would a ferret, and they have put it into their pockets alive to take home to give sport to a ferret or favourite terrier. In the buildings, and when thrashing stacks, he has seen them repeat this performance, and when questioned they seemed to think little or nothing of it.

Whilst on the subject of rats another little reminiscence may interest the reader. A retired farmer, now dead, always kept ferrets until the date of his death. He resided in a small house with a neatly-kept garden ; in a warm corner he had erected hutches, where he reared

and nurtured his pets, which included dogs and owls. Never was he seen abroad in any headgear but a weather-beaten chimney-pot hat that had seen better days. He occupied all his leisure time, when not engaged in his garden, scouring the country for miles around ratting. It was his delight to take all his rats home alive, and his favourite receptacle for carrying them was the aforesaid hat. When met he generally apologised, with a smile, for being unable to remove his head-covering, explaining that he had a full cargo. Oftentimes a considerable commotion would be going on inside that hat, but he only banged it with a stick and said, "They'll be quiet enough when they get home to-night," which was certainly true, for, unless he had a larger number than usual, their lives would not be worth a day's purchase. This old man would catch rats in his hands without the slightest hesitation.

HOW TO HANDLE LAID-UP FERRETS

Should a ferret "lay up," sport is considerably interfered with. When there are plenty of ferrets in the box it is usual to leave a boy behind to watch the earth, whilst the sport is continued in fresh places. Should the boy be unsuccessful in recovering the ferret, the task of getting it out presents itself, and the ways and means employed in so doing are many. Let us consider them.

The peculiar, and should be familiar, feed call is at times successful, but can never be relied on.

A loud and sudden noise, or a shot fired into the mouth of the burrow where the delinquent is supposed to be resting itself, occasionally brings the ferret out, but if it does it is generally too scared and upset to do more work for that day at least.

Another plan is to jump about on the

outside of the earth, and to beat the ground with the flat of a shovel or spade. The idea of this, apparently, is that by imitating a rabbit stamping, the ferret may think there is another rabbit outside or elsewhere, and bestir itself to find it, thus coming to the surface and showing itself, where the watcher is ready to lure it sufficiently out of the burrow so that it may be caught.

Sucking one's lips noisily at the entrance to the burrow, in imitation of a rabbit shrieking, is also had recourse to, with a view to drawing the ferret. This is a very old and favourite allure-ment, and usually attended with success. On one occasion in the author's recollection, the operator met with a success he little anticipated. He had stretched himself at full length upon the ground intently listening for any signs of the missing one. Alternately he listened and imitated a squeak. Suddenly the ferret,

having heard him, sprang forward and fixed its teeth firmly in his cheek. What he said had better not be recorded, but that ferret did not get the encouragement it perhaps deserved.

Some people use stench cartridges for driving ferrets out when they "lay up." They prepare these themselves with paper soaked in a solution of nitre and cayenne pepper or other inflammable material, which, when dry, is easily burnt, and the smoke caused to penetrate the earth by blocking up the entrance hole in which the fumigator is placed. These cartridges may be bought ready for use. Failing this, an ordinary fusee is often efficacious.

The best plan to recover the lost ferret is to run in a line ferret, which directs you to that part of the earth where it has temporarily located itself, and often has the effect of stirring it up and inducing it to come out. Should it not move, and you are convinced, by the working of

your line ferret, where it is, excavations may be commenced with a view to extracting it. You can tell by the marks on the line how many yards it is in, and it is not difficult to guess the probable depth. By following the line you can see how near you are to it, and when you are nearing it, you must remember to dig with great caution, otherwise you may, by a careless thrust of the spade, injure one, or both, of the ferrets. Digging out "laid-up" ferrets is often disheartening work, especially when the ferrets are coped. They may have got a rabbit, or more than one, in a blind pocket of the burrow, and not being able to get past the rabbit, so that they can scratch at its eyes, face, and neck, they force it on by scratching the fur off the rump, which causes the rabbit to burrow onwards in the hope of baffling its tormentor by the earth which it kicks into his face, or to squeeze itself into a very narrow part of

the burrow or the end of a pocket, and there allow itself to be tortured behind, believing that if it turns it will only meet with an untimely end ; and when the digger gets near the ferret and rabbit thus situated, the rabbit may move, and the digger will have had all his labour in vain.

THE WARRENER'S TELEPHONE

An implement often brought into use is a thin steel rod, somewhat like a small light crowbar. When a ferret is "laid up," this rod is driven into the ground, and the ferret worker uses it as a kind of telephone ; by placing his ear to the top he listens for any indication of the ferret's whereabouts, however faint it may be, to guide him in which direction to dig. This may have its advantages, but there is the risk of spearing the ferret every time it is driven into the ground, which would hardly recommend it.

THE LINE FERRET

For the line ferret an old buck, or a ferret that is specially adapted for the purpose, is usually selected, and it is used for the line only. The object of this is to train the ferret to use its own natural intelligence, and by being made aware of the line attached to its collar, it will not tie the line round a root, stub, or other projection, so often to be met with when a line ferret is employed.

Should all efforts fail to entice the "laid-up" ferret from its temporary lair, the worker must prepare the earth for setting a ferret trap.

CHAPTER VIII

FERRET TRAPS AND WORKING BOXES

Ferret Traps

THE reader must imagine for the moment that he has a ferret "laid-up," and all his endeavours to lure it forth have been unavailing. His only chance of recovering it is to set a ferret trap, unless he leaves it to its fate, or to luck, neither of which courses is to be recommended. The traps in use by keepers and others are numerous in design, but it is strange that there does not appear to be a good recognised ferret trap on the market, and when in want of a trap, one must either utilise some trap used for other purposes, or manufacture one as best one can.

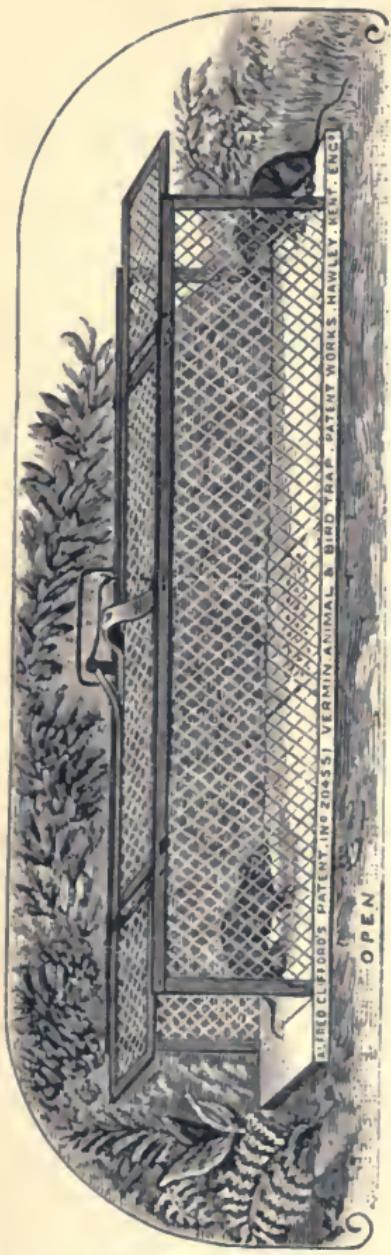


FIG. 32.

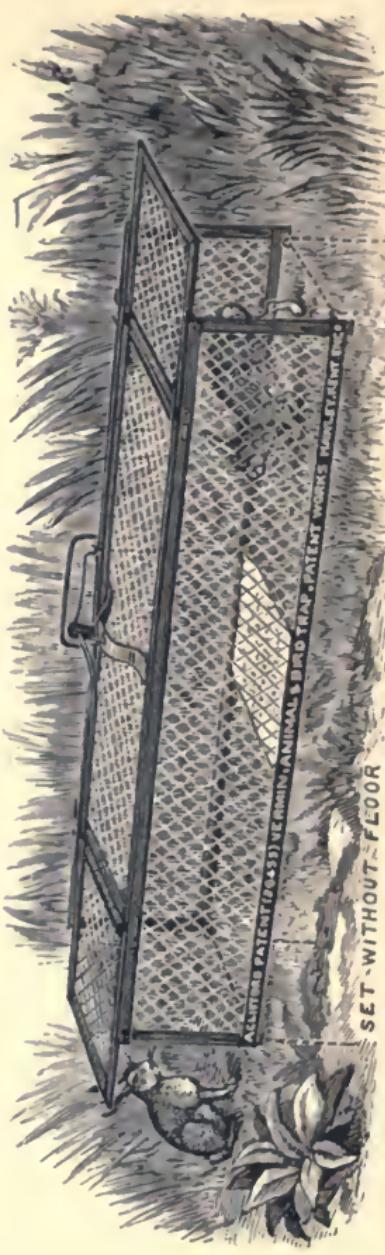


FIG. 33.

A wire trap, invented by Mr. Alfred Clifford, of Hawley, to catch rats, stoats, weasels, and other vermin, can be used for catching a "laid-up" ferret by placing it in front of the hole. The description, supplied by the inventor himself, is as follows:—"It has a trap door in centre of floor, and when set is perfectly level and cannot be noticed. The bait only requires to be laid on the floor of trap. Immediately the animal puts its weight on the hinged floor the doors close. It has a clear space right through, thereby causing no suspicion whatever. Strongly made in galvanised iron and painted. For catching rabbits, game, and such-like the floor can be taken away and the natural earth will form the floor. The trap can be taken to pieces in a few seconds and packed into a small space. It can also be used for catching laid-up ferrets, by placing it in front of the hole."

It must be remembered that ferreting

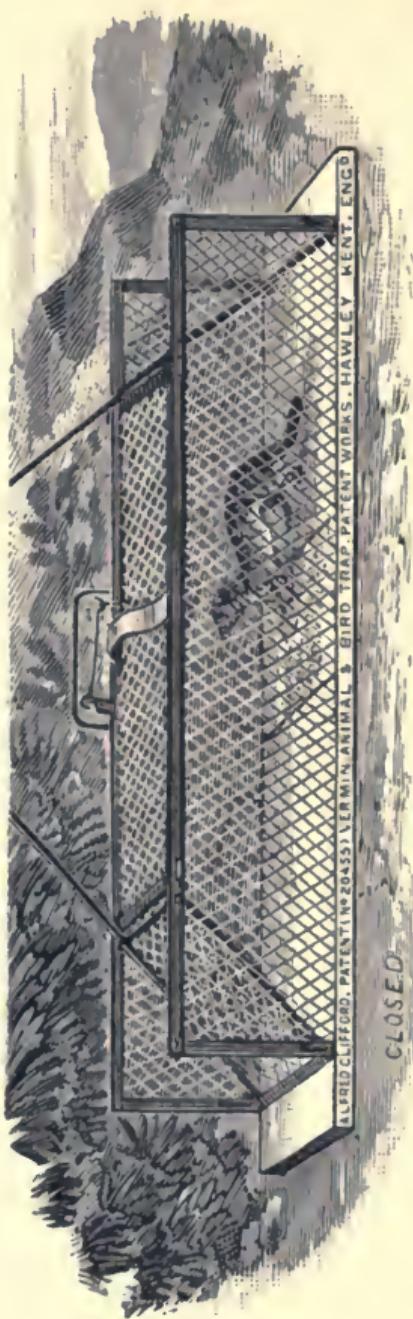


Fig. 34.

is done during the winter months. The trap would not be set until after sun-down, and ferrets are animals that must have warmth. Therefore, although it would most probably catch the ferret, unless released very soon afterwards the ferret would in all probability die from cold.

The author uses a wooden box trap of similar design, but the ferret when caught therein is as comfortable as it is in its own hutch and sleeping box at home. This box trap is baited with flesh food, and has a pan of milk and a comfortable straw bed ready for the ferret's reception after it has been caught. The ferrets get to know this trap by sight, and will go straight towards it in preference to anywhere else, which is to be desired.

If Mr. Clifford's traps were fitted up inside with a comfortable and warm sleeping place for the ferret (and there is no reason why, with a little alteration, this should not be done), it would do well

for a ferret trap, and would have the double advantage of being able to be used for other purposes.

Before setting a trap, the bolt holes of the burrow should all be blocked or stopped, by placing a sod of earth before each, but the main entrance should be left open and the trap set a few feet in front of it. Bait the trap with some of the entrails of a rabbit taken when "hulking," and, before placing this on the catch of the trap, trail it along the ground from the inside of the entrance to the earth, quite up to the mouth of the trap. The ferret, on emerging, will scent this trail and follow it up, which will lead to its capture. Some gamekeepers, when they have lost a ferret, do not set a trap or traps, but simply place straw in the entrance to the earth, blocking up all exits, and they argue that they are sure to find the ferret in the early morning of the next day asleep in this artificial bed.

An exceedingly simple box-trap is shown in Fig. 35 ; it is made of wood with a wire door. The ferret can easily push up this door, which acts automatically, and prevents its escape when once it is inside.

One of the simplest expedients which

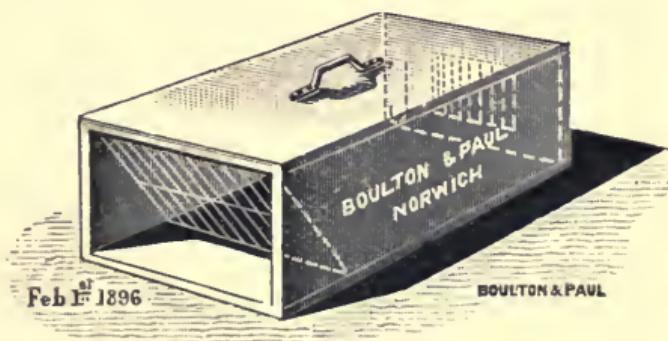


FIG. 35.

may be adapted to the emergency of a "laid-up" ferret is a pitfall made as follows :—Before leaving the earth for the night, dig, on the windward side of the main entrance to the earth, a small pit, about 13 to 15 inches square, and $2\frac{1}{2}$ feet deep, with evenly-cut perpendicular walls. Make a nice warm nest

of straw, hay, dry grass, or bracken, and, if wet weather or snow is expected, hollow out a cavity at the bottom, to give better shelter and comfort for this nest. Place a straight wand in the centre, which will stand some 6 inches or more above the level of the pit's mouth. On this wand place the bait, laying some thick pieces of stick over the top of the pit to enable the top to be covered with grass, etc., so that the pitfall is concealed and not suspected. The "laid-up" ferret, on emerging from the earth, will soon discover the bait, and, in endeavouring to get at it, will fall into the pit, where he will be found asleep in the morning.

Ferret. Boxes

Ferrets should be taken out in a proper ferret box, *not in a bag*. Bags harbour insects, are difficult to keep clean, are very stuffy for the ferrets, and on a

rainy day make the ferrets wet, cold, and miserable. A good box for the purpose is the one shown in Fig. 36. It is made either as a single or double box, with a stowage place for the line and collar for

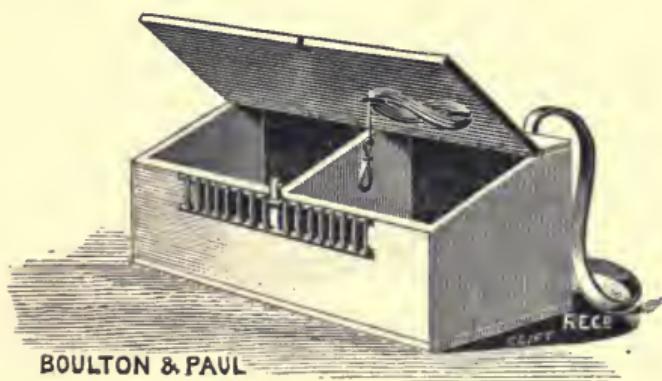


FIG. 36.

the line ferret. It is roomy, airy, and portable.

Ferret boxes must be kept scrupulously clean, and the remarks made in the chapter dealing with ferret hutches and sleeping compartments apply equally here.

CHAPTER IX

THE LAW RELATING TO FERRETS

Property in a ferret—Rights of the owner, rights of possession and retaking escaped ferret—"Finding's keeping"—Ownership of progeny—Rights of owner under the criminal law—Theft of ferrets—Can they be stolen?—Killing or injuring—Shooting and trapping stray ferrets—Rights of action under civil law—Recovery of ferret by action—Market overt—Action for damage for injury to ferret—Liabilities of owner under the criminal law—Cruelty to ferret—Liabilities under civil law—Damage committed by ferret—Killing chickens, sucking eggs, etc.—Scienter of owner not necessary—Not liable for wild rabbits killed—Liabilities of borrower and hirer—Distress for rent: *damage-feasant.*

PROPERTY IN A FERRET

THE right of ownership in game and wild animals (using the word wild in the

sense of untamed or undomesticated) is essentially different from that in ordinary domesticated animals. In wild animals, or what lawyers term animals *feræ naturæ*, there is no right of ownership until the animal is captured or killed. A pheasant or a partridge, a hare or a rabbit, for instance, belongs to no one, in the eye of the law, so long as it is at large. The same is the case with a fox, otter, badger, or other vermin. There is, however, a difference between the two classes of animals mentioned, viz. game and vermin, in regard to the right of property in them when killed; for whilst the law recognises in the owner of land from which game is started a sort of prospective right to it, so that, generally speaking, when killed it is deemed to belong to him, no one has even a prospective right in vermin, which, when trapped or killed, belong to the captor. The reason for the distinction, as given in

one of our oldest law books, is that “the otter, fox, and badger are vermin and pernicious to the commonwealth, and are carrion, but deer, pheasants, etc., are pleasure and good victuals.”

To which of the above classes, it will be asked, does the ferret belong? Its cousin, the stoat, as may be gathered from what is stated above, is outside the protection of the English law of property, and, being vermin, it belongs to the first person who catches or kills it. To the reader unlearned in the law it might seem that what is law for the stoat and the polecat might well be law for the ferret, and to some extent this is so; but in the main they are subject to different laws, as will shortly appear. The difference has arisen from the fact that the ferret, though naturally perhaps as wild as the stoat, has never lived in a state of nature in this country, so that our early lawyers found it impossible to class him with the

so-called animals *feræ naturæ*, whose chief characteristic was that they usually roamed about unattached to any particular person, and thus were not the subject of personal property.

As early as the reign of Elizabeth it was laid down as law that "a man may have a property in a ferret" (cited in Viner's *Abridgment*, 2nd edition, vol. xviii.). It must not, however, be lightly assumed that such property or ownership carries with it the same rights and liabilities as the ownership of a horse or a cow, or even a tame rabbit. This would be crediting our law with too great a simplicity of detail. In the present chapter the rights and liabilities attaching to such right of property or ownership in a ferret will be briefly discussed. It will perhaps be convenient to divide the subject under two heads, dealing first with the rights of the owner, and secondly with the duties of an owner, subdividing

the first into (1) rights of possession and property, (2) rights of the owner under the criminal law, (3) rights of action under the civil law, and subdividing the second head into (1) criminal liabilities and (2) civil liabilities. It is not, however, pretended that this division of the subject is in any respect a scientific one.

THE RIGHTS OF THE OWNER

Right of Possession

The owner having an absolute property in a ferret is, speaking generally, entitled to the possession of it against all other persons. If it escapes he may retake it wherever he can find it. He may even go so far as to commit an assault upon a person who has wrongfully obtained possession of it and refuses to give it up, being careful, however, to use no more violence than is necessary to effect the

recapture (see *Blades v. Higgs*, 1861, 30 L.J.C.P. 347). Let him beware, however, how he tries to take his ferret by force from any one but a man whom he can prove has obtained possession of it in other than a rightful manner.

There's an old saying that "finding's keeping," and, like many another wise saw, it has a grain of truth in it. The man who finds a ferret running at large and secures it, not having any idea who the rightful owner is, has a right to keep it against everybody but the owner himself. It is more than likely in such a case that the owner will never see his property again. If, however, he should find out who has caught it, he may have it back again if he can identify it, and let not his conscience trouble him that it is many months, or even years, since he lost it, or that the finder of it has expended a good deal more than its value on its keep. His remedy may be by civil action or

(possibly) by criminal prosecution, as will be shortly seen.

The owner of a doe ferret is the owner of her young, notwithstanding she was lined by another man's buck without the consent of the owner of the latter, and even though it was done by fraud or stealth, though in such case the owner of the buck might claim the value of the service or damages for interfering with his property.

RIGHTS OF THE OWNER UNDER THE CRIMINAL LAW

Under this head it will be natural to deal first with the question of larceny or theft, and then with that of injuries done to the animal.

Can a man steal a ferret? In other words, has the owner of a ferret any *criminal* remedy against the person who maliciously takes it away? If it is a

criminal offence to take another's ferret it must be so either by common law or statute. Let us see how the law stands with regard to each.

At common law—that is, apart from statute—animals *feræ naturæ* were incapable of being stolen, for the simple reason that no one was considered as having any property in them, and so an indictment could not be framed, it being essential that the name of the owner of anything alleged to have been stolen should be set out in the indictment. This exemption, however, could hardly have been reasonably extended to ferrets, seeing that at such an early date our lawyers had declared them to be the subject of property, and to this extent different from animals *feræ naturæ*.

But amongst animals of which there could be ownership there were some which our law regarded as not capable of being stolen. For it was laid down by our ancient jurists that certain animals were

of such a base nature that larceny could not be committed of them. Some animals, now invariably tame, came within this definition, as dogs and cats, and others which, though unusually wild in this or other countries, were often kept in confinement, such as "bears, foxes, apes, monkeys, polecats, ferrets, and the like" (Coke, 3rd Inst. 108, 109). The reason was said to be that "creatures of this kind, for the most part wild in their nature, and not serving when reclaimed for food, but only for pleasure, ought not, however the owner may value them, to be so highly regarded by the law that for their sakes a man should die" (Russell on Crimes, citing Hale, P.C. c. 33). (It will be remembered that in old days larceny was a capital offence.) It is a curious fact that the last case dealing with this exemption from the law of larceny should have been a prosecution for stealing ferrets. In the case of *R. v.*

Searing (Russ. & R. 350), decided as far back as the year 1818, the prisoner was charged with stealing five live tame ferrets confined in a certain hutch, the property of one Flower. It was proved that the ferrets were taken by the prisoner under such circumstances as to constitute larceny, if they were the subject of larceny, and also that he sold them for 9s. The jury found the prisoner guilty, but a motion was made to arrest judgment on the ground that ferrets were animals of so base a nature that the law would not recognise them as capable of being stolen, and the judges held that, though tame and saleable, they could not be the subject of larceny, and discharged the prisoner.

No other conclusion can therefore be come to than that *at common law* no one could or can be criminally prosecuted for taking another man's ferret. The vagaries of our common law on the subject of larceny will be thought somewhat

curious when it is stated that although a dog, cat, or ferret was not, a hawk kept for sport was capable of being stolen.

So much for the common law. A statute of 1861 (24 and 25 Vict. c. 96), re-enacting and extending older statutes, after special provisions dealing with the stealing of dogs, enacts (sec. 21) that "whoever shall steal any bird, beast, or other animal ordinarily kept in a state of confinement, or for any domestic purpose . . . or shall wilfully kill . . . with intent to steal," shall be liable to imprisonment not exceeding six months, or else to forfeit by way of penalty over and above the value of the thing stolen or killed not exceeding £20, and for a second offence provide imprisonment up to twelve months. There is also provision made for dealing out similar punishment to the receiver of any such bird, beast, or animal, knowing the same to be stolen (sec. 22).

One would, at first blush, be inclined to say that the section quoted clearly includes ferrets within its purview as "animals ordinarily kept in a state of confinement." They cannot in this country be kept otherwise than in a state of confinement. The question, however, has never yet, as far as the writer knows, come before any judge of the High Court, and the law on this point cannot be said to be otherwise than uncertain until it has been decided before the five or more judges who compose the Court for Crown Cases Reserved. When so great an authority as the late Mr. Justice Stephen has expressly refrained from giving an opinion ("I know not whether a ferret would fall within the statute or not," *Dig. Cr. Law*, 230), it would be almost presumptuous to hazard any opinion as to whether ferrets are the subjects of theft under the statute; but looking at the tendency of judges to abolish useless

distinctions, there is in all probability but a very indifferent chance for the convicted prisoner who risks taking the opinion of the Court for Crown Cases Reserved on the point. As all offences under these sections are dealt with summarily, it is hardly likely that justices, who would naturally take a common-sense rather than a technical view of the statute, will ever give a defendant the benefit of the doubt.

KILLING OR INJURING FERRETS

The statute dealing with malicious injuries to property, of the same year as that above cited (24 and 25 Vict., c. 97), provides (sec. 41) that the same maximum punishment as for theft shall await any one who unlawfully and maliciously kills or wounds any animal ordinarily kept in a state of confinement, although not with intent to steal. As to this statute

there is no doubt: ferrets are clearly within its scope.

The word "maliciously" in the above statute means with intent to do damage, or recklessly, careless whether damage be done or not. The wounding must also be done unlawfully. Now, it is perfectly lawful to protect the game or rabbits on your land by killing vermin, or, in fact, anything that is chasing them, if you cannot otherwise save them. If, therefore, you see a stray ferret killing a rabbit on your land, or about to enter a burrow, shoot it if you like, and you can get into no trouble for so doing. Here you will note a difference between a ferret and some other animal, say a cat. For if you shoot a cat, whose only offence is that it is in the immediate vicinity of your rabbit burrows, you may be liable under the statute, the distinction between the two cases being for the simple reason that you are not legally entitled to do more than protect

your game for the time being ; and whilst you can frighten a cat away and so avert the immediate danger to your rabbits, the effect of noise on the ferret would in all probability be to make it take to earth.

If you know there is a stray ferret lying up in your burrows, catch it or trap it any way you can, as you would a stoat or rat. If, however, you find a ferret in your field, or in your barn or stackyard, not near your chickens or anything else for which it has a fancy, but right away from anything which there is danger of its immediately killing, it seems doubtful whether you are justified in killing it, if at least you can catch it without being bitten.

A man may lawfully set a trap for vermin in his own garden or field, and is not responsible if a cat or a ferret gets caught (*Bryan v. Eaton*, 40 J.P. 213); but if he catches one he should, apart from mere considerations of humanity, put it

to death as soon as he knows it has been caught, for if he leaves it to suffer for any length of time he may be convicted of cruelty under the Act, to which we shall shortly refer.

RIGHTS OF ACTION UNDER THE CIVIL LAW

If a man loses his ferret he is entitled to recover it by action from any person whom he finds in possession of it, save in the exceptional case of the latter having purchased it in what is called *market overt*. He should, however, first make a demand for possession, and if the person in possession refuses to part with it, the owner may sue for the ferret in the County Court, and recover it or its value by way of damages, and possibly further damages for its detention. The County Court Rules provide that the judge may make an order for the delivery by the

defendant of specific property, or in default for the payment of the value of such property to be assessed by the judge or jury, and that under such a judgment the plaintiff may issue a warrant for delivery of the property, and that, if the same cannot be found, the bailiff shall distrain all the lands and chattels of the defendant and hold them until the defendant delivers the specific property for the return of which judgment has been given, or, at the option of the plaintiff, that the bailiff cause to be made of the defendant's goods the assessed value of the property (O. xxv. r. 50).

As stated above, the recovery of a ferret by legal action resolves itself into a question of identification of the ferret, and although one ferret may differ from another ferret in its usefulness as a worker, as one star differeth from another star in its glory, still it cannot be denied that to the inexperienced eye of a County

Court judge, and even to the experienced eye of a gamekeeper, one ferret may appear as like another ferret as one pea is like another pea. So let the owner not go into Court unless he has clear evidence that the ferret in question is the one he has lost. He may even go so far as to obtain from the Court before the trial of his case an order for himself or his witnesses to inspect the ferret alleged to be his, but unless he is bent on getting it back at all costs, he will hardly think it worth while to go to such expense, for to take such unusual proceedings he will find it necessary to employ a solicitor, whose costs—or at least a considerable portion of them—he will have to pay out of his own pocket.

As before hinted, the owner is entitled to recover his property without paying anything for its keep. The finder has no lien on it for expenses (*Binstead v. Buck*, 2 W. Bl. 117).

In the exceptional case above referred to of a ferret having been bought in *market overt*—that is, in any established market where the sale of such things ordinarily takes place, such as Leadenhall Market, or any shop in the City of London where such things are usually sold—he has a good title to it against every one, including the real owner, so that in such a case the owner's remedy for its recovery is gone.

"An action lies for injury to any domestic or tame animal, and to all animals usually marketable, as parrots, monkeys," etc. (Notes to Viner's *Abridgment*, vol i. p. 621). This would include ferrets, notwithstanding the seeming inconsistency of the law on the question of property in larceny of a ferret. Malicious—that is, intentional—injuries, which, we regret to say, are as common as injuries caused by negligence, have been dealt with above. Injuries by

negligence—for there must be negligence to give a right of action—render the person causing the injury liable to an action for damages. Thus, if a man through carelessness shoots another's ferret without just cause, he must make good the loss, as he must also if his insufficiently trained dog, through excess of zeal, kills a ferret of the professional rat-catcher whom he has engaged to clear his stacks or barns, in mistake for a rat. Injuries caused by inadvertence without negligence render no one responsible.

LIABILITIES OF OWNERS UNDER THE CRIMINAL LAW

Under the Act for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, a person who wilfully ill-uses or tortures any domestic animal renders himself liable to a penalty of £5 or imprisonment. Whether a ferret is

within its provisions may be somewhat doubtful. On the one hand the cases have gone so far as to bring a decoy linnet within the purview of the Act (*Colam v. Pagett*, 1884, 53 L.J.M.C. 64), whilst it has been, and undoubtedly rightly, held that an ordinary caged wild animal, such as a lion or bear, is not within the term "domestic animal," and so outside the scope of the Act (*Harper v. Marcks*, 1894, 63 L.J.M.C. 167); and more recently it has been held that a tame sea-gull, kept by a photographer for the purpose of introducing into his pictures, was not within the Act. The mere confinement of wild animals does not make them domestic, but there seems a tendency on the part of the judges that, if so far tamed as to be subservient to the use of man, animals wild by nature would come within the term "domestic animals." Apart from the natural readiness of the judges to extend

the scope of so beneficent an Act as far as possible, we would hazard the opinion that ferrets are not domestic animals; but bearing in mind the tendency hinted at, we should rather expect, if ever the question arise, that some at least of our High Court judges would be prepared to hold them to be within the Act.

Leaving an animal without food for a long time is within the Act, but mere passing cruelty, such as not promptly putting to death an injured animal, has been held not to be. Each case must, however, depend on all the special circumstances, and there is no doubt that what was in the first instance passive cruelty may, after lapse of time, be held to have developed into active cruelty.

Regarding the baiting of animals, including ferrets, such conduct is very properly punishable with fine or imprisonment, under sec. 3 of the last-mentioned Act, which expressly extends to any

animal. Even if the fight is not arranged, but has arisen accidentally, the same penalty is incurred by any one who encourages or assists in it.

LIABILITIES UNDER THE CIVIL LAW

For the purpose of classifying the liabilities of owners for injuries committed by animals belonging to them, the animal world as a whole is divided into two classes, viz. domestic animals, in the sense of animals not usually accustomed to do injury, as cattle, dogs, cats, etc., and animals which are or may be injurious, as bears, monkeys, etc.

The distinction is most important, for, with regard to the first class, the owner is not liable for injuries committed to the person or property of another (except in the case of trespass of cattle and the like), unless he had a knowledge—a *scienter*, as it is called—of the propensities of the

animal; hence the old maxim, “Every dog may have his one bite free”—a maxim by no means correct, as *scienter* may be proved otherwise than by showing that the animal had actually committed similar damage before. With regard, however, to the second class of animals, the owner keeps them at his peril, and is liable for injuries committed by them should they escape. Thus the organ grinder, whose monkey bites any one,—the menagerie keeper, whose tigers, bears, or elephants escape and commit injury,—is liable to be mulcted in damages.

In the second of these two classes may be put ferrets. The readiness with which one at large will attack the chickens in a neighbour's hen-roost or coop and suck eggs in a nest, makes it incumbent on an owner to see that his hutches are carefully barred and free from holes through which there is a possibility of one of his ferrets escaping, and also to take care

when rabbiting or ratting not to leave a ferret lying up in an earth or rat-hole without some one being left or some means taken to secure it when it comes out, especially if the spot where it lies is near a neighbour's land, for the law is that the owner is responsible for *any and every* damage committed by any one of these animals that is at large, and it is not necessary to prove *scienter* or that the owner knew it was likely to do damage. It is of no use for the owner to say that it escaped without his negligence, or even that he left the hutch securely fastened, and some evil-disposed person came in the night and opened the door. He must pay and look pleasant (if he can), and he may feel happy if he gets his ferret back again, for, as mentioned above, his neighbour has a perfect right to shoot or kill the ferret if he cannot otherwise protect his own property. So whether it be chickens or eggs, or tame rabbits that the ferret

has left his marks on, it will be well for the owner to "square the case" if the claim is *bona-fide*, and save the expense of going into court.

There is but little danger, owing to the natural timidity of the ferret, of a claim being made for personal injuries sustained, but an instance has been mentioned in the earlier pages of this book of one attacking a baby. For such an injury the owner would also be liable, as he might too if a neighbour, finding one in or near his hen-roost, and having no other method of securing it, tried to seize it with his hand in the ordinary way, and without negligence on his part was bitten in the attempt.

What is law for the tame rabbit, however, is not law for the wild one, and though the person owning the land, or the sporting rights over the land, on which an escaped ferret is at large may shoot the ferret if such a course be neces-

sary to protect the rabbits, he has no right to redress for any rabbits that may have been killed, though, of course, if a man go ferreting rabbits on another's land, he is committing a trespass in search of game, and liable accordingly.

It might be mentioned that pheasants under a hen or in a mew, or partridges in a coop, would fall under the same rule as tame rabbits, as would also game eggs, though laid by wild birds.

In this connection it may be well to notice the liabilities of the person who hires or borrows ferrets. It is, of course, a very common practice to borrow ferrets, as well as to hire a man to bring and work his own ferrets. Both the hirer and the borrower of a ferret are liable for loss of it or injury to it owing to their negligence, though the amount of care required to be taken of a borrowed article or animal is said to be greater than that required from one who pays for its

hire ; in other words, a greater degree of negligence is necessary to render the hirer liable than is required to charge the borrower. It is difficult to give definitions of the degree of care required. It is common practice to take more care of a borrowed thing than of one's own, and it is this extra care that is usually bestowed on borrowed articles, whatever they may be, that is demanded by the law of a borrower ; whilst it may be laid down as a general rule that a hirer is only responsible if he uses less care than an ordinary man uses about his own things.

Either a borrower or a hirer would be liable if the ferret was shot whilst being worked, or if it was lost owing to the lid of the ferret box being carelessly left unfastened ; but, on the other hand, neither would be under liability for its loss if the ferret was stolen from the hutch in which it was temporarily kept, supposing the

hutch was placed in a reasonably secure place.

If a borrowed or hired ferret lays up in a burrow or hole, the borrower or hirer must use all reasonable means to recapture it, and he may be liable for its loss if he fails to do so.

It might be added as a word of warning that if a ferret is borrowed expressly for rabbiting, and is used for ratting and gets killed or injured, the borrower will be liable for the loss or injury, however caused ; so, if a man borrows for his own use, and then lends to another without the owner's knowledge and consent, he will be liable for loss or injury happening, from whatever cause arising ; and the law seems to be the same if a man expressly borrow a ferret for one day only, or to work one warren or one stack, and keeps it beyond the day, or uses it for another warren or stack. He becomes in such cases an insurer.

The hirer or borrower will incur the same liability for damage done by an escaped ferret he has hired or borrowed than (as has been seen above) the owner would do if it escaped from *his* custody, each being considered for this purpose the owner *pro tem.*

For the above reasons it is always more advisable to have the owner or some one acting for him come with ferrets that are hired or borrowed. In such case the hirer or borrower gets rid of all liability, as the ferrets are always in charge of the owner or his agent.

It is a curious and somewhat difficult question to say whether ferrets can be lawfully distrained for rent. It is laid down by Lord Coke that distress "must be of a thing whereof a valuable property is in somebody, and therefore dogs, bucks, does, conies, and the like, that are *feræ naturæ*, cannot be distrained" (*Coke upon Littleton*, 2nd ed., p. 47); and upon

his authority apparently all subsequent writers, down to and including Blackstone, have stated that dogs are not distrainable, as not being the subject of valuable property; and yet these same writers (*e.g.* Viner's *Abridgment*, previously quoted) have expressly laid it down that a man can have a property in hounds.

The law that these old writers applied to dogs they would undoubtedly have also applied to ferrets, for it seems to have been held that no animal that could not be the subject of larceny—a question which is referred to above—was capable of being distrained for rent. The better opinion seems to be that at the present time dogs *are* distrainable for rent, but that such animals as ferrets are still exempt.

In addition to distress for rent, there is another class of distress, viz. of animals taken whilst doing damage—*damage-*

feasant, as the law has it. No class of animals is exempt from this kind of distress, so that a man finding a neighbour's ferret in the act of sucking his hen eggs, or attacking his chickens, is justified in keeping it (if he can catch it) until the damage is paid for. As, however, this kind of distress confers no power of sale, but merely a right to keep the thing distrained until the damage is made good by its owner, the right may not be a very valuable one.

APPENDIX

PART I

VERMIN TRAPS

TRAPS which are used for catching and killing vermin may be objected to by the reviewer as irrelevant to the present work, but it must be remembered that when a ferret is lost on a rabbit warren it must be retaken by fair means or foul, otherwise it will cause great havock and destruction on the warren.

The traps now placed before the reader are the best for the purpose of catching polecats, ferrets, stoats, weasels, or rats, that have come under the author's notice during a number of years' practical experience.

Fig. 37 is perhaps better known under the name of "The Dorset Trap." It is a very strong and well made spring-fall, capable of being used for almost anything.

Fig. 38 shows a simple cage trap, made

of wire netting, for taking vermin alive. It is baited inside, and, as a rule, when one has been

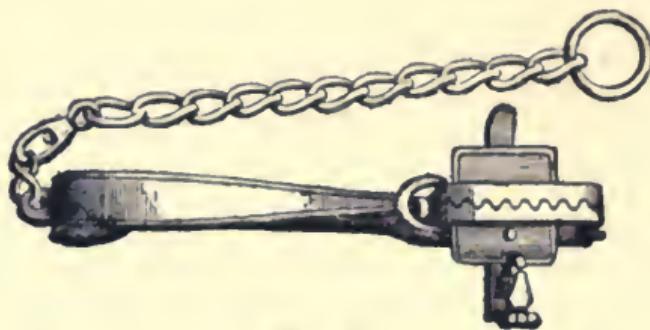


FIG. 37.

caught, others are sure to follow. It is very light and effective.

Figs. 39 and 40 illustrate another trap

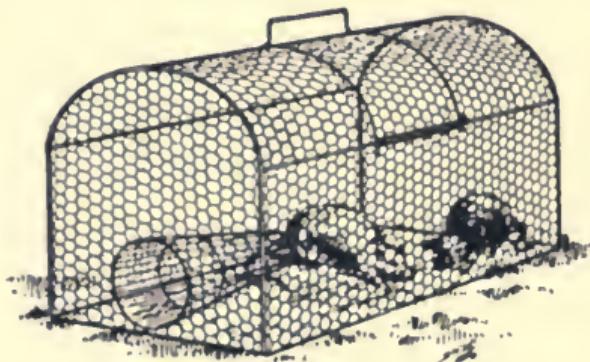


FIG. 38.

which has been used with considerable success. It is "Everitt's Patent Safety Humane Vermin Trap." It should be set in the middle of

bridges connecting two coverts, or the covert to the pasture or arable land, at the mouth of

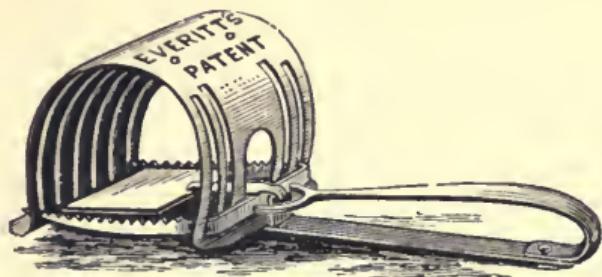


FIG. 39.

drain pipes, channels, or small tunnels, where stoats are in the habit of frequenting, and, as it is well known they prefer to go through an

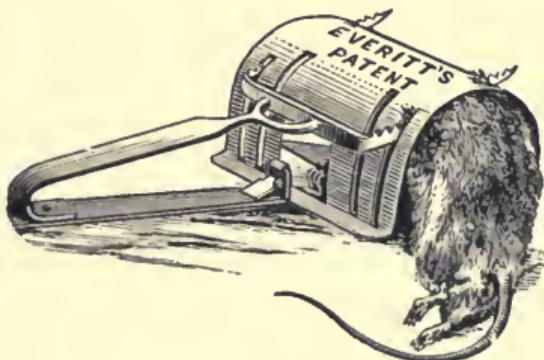


FIG. 40.

opening in preference to climbing over any obstacle or making a detour, they fall ready victims. The great advantage of this trap over others lies in the fact that it will only

catch vermin, and it can be set on feeding grounds or anywhere in the open poultry-yard with impunity.

The trap is shown both set and sprung. It was invented by the author's brother, and the idea was suggested to him by the short tunnels made by rats in the corn straw, on the pheasants' feeding grounds in the coverts. He thought that if something could be invented which could be placed in these short runs, which would catch or kill the vermin, but would not catch young pheasants nor full-grown ones, it would prove not only successful, but would be a boon and a blessing to all game preservers. This trap was the outcome of his experiments.

That it has been as successful as was anticipated by its inventor is best answered by the very large sale it has had and is still having; but to all inventions there are small drawbacks, and in this (if it can be called a drawback) there is a little difficulty which one unskilled in the art of trapping will meet with; it is in the setting, though this remark applies equally to all traps.

For stoats and weasels it is unrivalled.

PART II

Rats and ratting—The black rat, the brown rat, and their origin—Rats addicted to cannibalism—Rats in France—Tame Japanese rats—Ratting from stacks—Habits of rats in September, October, November, and December—Their tunnellings in stacks—Ratting from hedgerows and fences—Shooting rats in and under water—Ricochetting shots—Ferreting rats from old rabbit burrows—Rats standing at bay—The danger of drains and under-drains—Ratting from barns and buildings—Fate of lost ferrets in buildings—Ratting with poison—Different poisons and how to use them—Capitation grant for killing rats.

RATS AND RATTING

RATS are so common with us that a description of their appearance is not required, but a few general remarks by way of preliminary may not be thought out of place.

This genus of rodent mammalia is amongst

the greatest of animal pests in dwelling-houses, ships, storehouses, magazines of provisions, granaries, farm buildings, game preserves, agricultural districts—in fact, in almost any part of the habitable globe. It is fortunate, indeed, for us that we acclimatised ferrets, so that we can in a measure combat with rats and drive them from places which might otherwise be inaccessible.

Two species of rats are found in Britain and in most temperate countries, the black rat (*Mus rattus*), and the brown rat (*Mus deumanus*). The first is the oldest inhabitant of this country; the other, which was introduced from Asia (and not, as is commonly supposed, from Norway), is amazingly prolific, and has multiplied at the expense of the black rat. M.^rde Buffon, writing at the commencement of the present century, entered into much visionary theory and fruitless speculation regarding this animal (with others), which the Rev. W. Hutton is supposed to have abridged in his 1821 edition, from which latter work is appended a short extract; it will in a measure interest, if not amuse, the reader:—"In old houses, in the country especially, where great

quantities of corn are kept, and where the neighbouring barns and haystacks favour their retreat, as well as their multiplication, they are often so numerous that the inhabitants would be obliged to remove with their furniture, were they not to devour each other. This we have often, by experience, found to be the case when they have been in any degree straightened for provisions; and the method they take to lessen their numbers is for the stronger to fall upon the weaker. This done, they lay open their skulls, and first eat up the brains; afterwards, the rest of their body. The next day hostilities are renewed in the same manner; nor do they suspend their havock till the majority are destroyed. For this reason it is that, after any place has for a long while been infested with rats, they often seem to disappear of a sudden, and sometimes for a considerable time." It might be added that it is a singular circumstance in the history of these animals that the skins of such as have been found, presumably devoured by others of their tribe, have been curiously turned inside out, every part, even to the ends of the toes, being completely inverted.

Before the brown rat was imported, or, rather, of its own accord visited our shores, as we cannot believe that any one would introduce such a nuisance, the black rat reigned supreme. Now the black rat has become comparatively rare. The last instance we heard of a specimen being obtained was by an undergraduate at Cambridge from a slaughter house about November 1895. He was fortunate enough to secure both a male and a female, but during a temporary absence one of his terriers obtained access to them and spoilt both the skins.

The sagacity of rats in avoiding the traps and snares laid for them is astonishing, and the many means they employ to outwit their enemies is only equalled by their amazing fecundity. They often breed several times during the course of a year, and bring forth as many as from twelve to eighteen young ones at a time. Hence the difficulties of effectually exterminating them. M. St. Pierre informs us (it is given for what it is worth): "In the Isle of France rats are so extremely numerous that at sunset they may be seen running about in all directions, and frequently destroy a

whole crop of corn in a single night. In some of the houses they swarm so prodigiously that thirty thousand have been killed in a year. They have also subterraneous magazines of corn and fruit, and even climb the trees to devour the young birds." In a London journal we recently read a most interesting article on the cultivation of rats and rat-farming in France, and now regret that we neglected to keep a cutting. Kaempfer gives a different experience of rats, for he says : "The Japanese have a method of taming rats, and of teaching them a variety of entertaining tricks, which are occasionally exhibited for the amusement of the populace." Similar exhibitions have also been given in the streets of London.

RATTING FROM STACKS

In the country we find the rats begin to draw out from the winter haunts and to distribute themselves all over the fields as soon as the corn and grass commence to grow up. They make their burrows everywhere, and nest and bring forth their young.

In September, when the corn and grass has been cut, the rats get into the spinneys and fences. They still find plenty of food from the stack of the cornfields, and are partial to turnips and swedes. Later on, as the food supply grows scarcer, they draw nearer to the stacks, farm buildings, and root hales. They do not take up a permanent abode in these places, but still prefer to have their lodgings in banks and such-like places, taking nocturnal ramblings in search of their food. It requires no keen observer to locate the paths or runs they make when travelling to and from the places named. On first visiting the stacks they climb to the roof and burrow under the thatch, making a road or tunnel all round under the eaves, with short runs under the roof, gradually extending their ramifications downwards towards the bottom of the stack, where they intend to locate their abode during the coming winter.

In October their stack workings are in full swing, and then, as the old Suffolk poachers' song (slightly revised) has it—

'Tis our delight, on a moonlight night,
With a terrier to be there.

Ratting—not in the political sense intended to be conveyed by Lord Campbell—on a bright October night round the stacks, with sticks and good dogs, is excellent and exciting sport. Two can go in a party, but four or six is the best number. Silently and cautiously an approach is made to within a hundred yards, when the quicker that last part of the journey is negotiated the better. By ten or eleven o'clock the rats have finished their evening meal, and are busily engaged in tunnelling operations. Most of them are high up in the sides of the stack, or just under the roof. As before said, they complete their roads to the roof first, so that they can get easy access to moisture in the evening, early morning, or at other times when the elements give them opportunity. Deprived of this, they would be compelled to sally forth in search of drink, which, their sagacity suggests to them, is not altogether unattended with danger, and, like Masterman Ready's—a hero in the literature of our youth—that journey may one day prove to be the last. Barley stacks are the best for choice, but at this time of the year a find is almost certain in any corn stack. On hearing a noise

the rats will endeavour to make for the bottom of the stack, where they know they are safe. On arrival, the ratters take up their positions at the corners of the stack visited. The dogs require no guidance in sport of this kind, they being, as a rule, keener than their masters. More often than not, the dogs arrive first, and a squeal and scuffle announce the first victim before any one else is within twenty yards of the stack.

Watching the dogs, one is often able to locate a rat. The eager little canine shows unmistakably the whereabouts of the quarry, and open-mouthed waits his chance to get at it. Listening intently, a slight rustle in the straw is heard. Immediately the long sticks are brought to bear on the place, and prodded well into the stack. If the thrust is a good one, and the stick goes anywhere near the rat, it so frightens it that it springs out on to the ground, where the dogs soon make short work of it; or it scrambles on to the roof, whence it is dislodged by the sticks of the party. A light, active little terrier is sometimes hoisted on to the roof, where he materially assists in adding to the number of the

slain, but in his excitement he cannot contain himself, and rarely stops there long, which necessitates extra attention on the part of some one to constantly replace him. After a rat has been located, prodded out, and killed, the strictest silence is maintained, until another is heard and similarly treated, and so the game continues until it is thought advisable to move an adjournment. Fifty to a hundred rats per night killed in this manner is by no means an uncommon record in East Anglia. The brighter the night the better, although on dark evenings good bags have been made with lanterns, working in a similar manner to what we have described.

In November, especially after an early fall of snow, which drives rats to the stacks quicker than anything, this night ratting perhaps surpasses that of October, but the later it is the more the rats have extended their tunnellings, and the more difficult they are to secure.

Towards the middle of November they will have tunnelled almost all over the stack, and ferreting is had recourse to in order to kill them. Sometimes ferrets are used at

night, but this is unsatisfactory, and not to be advised or recommended.

When ferreting stacks, always use sticks and dogs in preference to guns. The reason should be obvious. In shooting a rat running along the straw or roof of the stack, there is nothing to stop the shot, which penetrates far into the stack, and most probably kills or wounds a ferret at the same time. It is always advisable to start ratting early in the season, as the later it is put off the more difficult it is to get at and to kill the rats.

In December rats are very partial to root hales, from which they are at all times most difficult to drive out, and in order to kill them poison is generally used, concerning which a few remarks will be made in another paragraph.

RATTING FROM HEDGEROWS AND FENCES

Having referred to ratting from stacks, we will now turn our attention to the hedgerows and fences. Dogs and sticks, or dogs and guns, are used for this purpose, although the professional ratter, who reckons on a double

profit by taking his quarry alive, employs traps, nets, and other engines. Dogs and sticks are preferable to dogs and guns, for the same reason as has been alluded to in our remarks on stack ratting. Rat burrows, as a rule, do not go far into the ground, but more often run along just beneath the bank, and ferrets are frequently shot and wounded when guns are employed.

In any event good ratting dogs should be taken, whilst, as a rule, guns will only be found useful when ratting round water. Doubling the hedgerow, the dogs try every hole, and rarely if ever fail to inform whether the intended victim is at home or not. Having found, a halt is made, all are posted to the best advantage, and the ferrets turned in.

One of the chief attractions of ratting is that long waits are the exception and not the rule. Almost as soon as the tip of a ferret's tail disappears, the rat or rats make an exit and the fun commences. Should there be a nest of them, it is just the same. They tumble out in all directions as quickly as possible, and the scrimmage which ensues is often as amusing to the onlooker as it is excit-

ing to the participators. Dogs, sticks, rats, and men are mixed up in one confused mêlée. Sometimes a dog is hit, a man bitten, and a ferret mauled, whilst the rat makes good his escape in the confusion.

When a ditch is near the bolt holes the rats invariably take to the water, and, plunging in, dive along the bottom, seeking a hole well under the bank by which they can escape without coming again to the surface.

In the excitement of the moment, one's friend on the opposite bank, on seeing the rat thus swimming along under water, is more likely to fire and smother one with mud and water than he is to injure the rat. This is easily explained. In shooting at an object under water, the aim must be directed a few inches underneath it, as the refraction is misleading to the eye, and it must be remembered that the greater the obliquity of the vision, the more allowance must be made. Whenever ferreting near water, be most careful of ricochetting shots. Many an eye has been lost, and many a serious injury inflicted, by thoughtless and careless shooting on, in, and beneath the surface of water.

In ferreting fences it is a good plan to teach the dogs to stand at the places assigned to them, and not to permit them to ramble at will from hole to hole, or as fancy or eagerness may dictate.

Ferreting rats from old rabbit burrows is often an easier task than ferreting them from short holes of their own. In the former they have plenty of room and easy means of escape, whereas in the latter, if they are pent up for room, or cannot easily get away without offering a weak spot to the ferret, they will at times retire to a narrow pocket, or *cul de sac*, and stand at bay. Should a rat stand at bay, and the ferret be unable to get round him, he is very difficult to dislodge. The ratter soon knows when this has happened, as the ferret will after a time back out of the hole with the hair on its tail standing straight out, like a chimney-sweeper's broom, its back up, with every appearance of anger, and an eager desire to fight. The instinct of the ferret tells it that the rat has the advantage, and this habit of backing out may be a ruse to induce the rat to quit his stronghold. Under these circumstances there are few ferrets, however

good they may be, that dare face a rat. If they do, they are apt to get worsted, and we have frequently seen ferrets one after another back out of a hole, badly bitten and certainly defeated. Under such circumstances it is best to at once either dig the rat out or give it up.

In ferreting round hedgerows and fences, one so often encounters old drains and under-drains, which are such a continual source of danger to the ferrets, that we would draw special attention to them. In the early autumn, before the rains have set in, they are most treacherous, as they are dry, and the ferrets have no hesitation in entering, whereas later on, when there is plenty of moisture about the fields, the drains can the easier be located, and they are by no means so attractive to the ferret, whose natural instinct is adverse to dampness and water. As a rule, a rat which is accustomed to use the drain makes his hole about a foot away from its entrance, and often has an exit in the centre of the field in which the drain is laid, perhaps sixty yards away. Should a ferret enter an under-drain, the odds are it will never return. It seems that the

ferret goes some distance up the drain, and, on abandoning hope of getting to the rat, becomes jammed in its endeavours to turn round and get back again, and it dies a lingering death from cold and starvation.

RATTING FROM BARNS AND BUILDINGS

Having already referred to this sub-heading when dealing with the handling and working of ferrets in a preceding chapter, we have no wish to repeat ourselves, and, as we do not propose to deal with the subject at length, we trust the reader will forgive us should we slightly err in the respect named.

In buildings, rats lay in the goods stored therein, in the floors, and in the roof. A first preliminary is to carefully examine all the holes, bolt holes, and escape holes that can be found, taking special note of all drains. It is as well to block any of these latter should there be a possibility of the ferrets being able to get into them. If guns are used, it is as well to post their holders outside, with instructions only to shoot at rats on the roof

(that is, if the owner of the roof does not object), and where there is no possibility of anything else except the rat being hurt. At all times ratting round buildings with guns is highly dangerous. We have, however, done considerable execution with small .410 bores, which are sufficiently large for this purpose, and do little if any damage. Dogs and sticks are best, and the sport obtained is most fascinating.

Having guarded or stopped all outlets and escape holes, the goods inside the building are carefully removed, and any outlying rats killed. The floor being then exposed, the holes are well ferreted and the fun is at an end. Never risk losing a ferret in or near farm premises, or where poultry and small stock are kept, as ferrets are the most destructive little creatures out, especially amongst the poultry.

In ferreting granaries it is most difficult to recover the ferrets, and the flooring has often to be pulled up and the match boarding on the walls removed before a rescue can be effected. We know of many instances in which, when pulling down or restoring old

warehouses, mummy ferrets have been found wedged in the woodwork, their positions telling all too plainly how they met with their death.

RATTING WITH POISON

Perhaps this sub-heading may be regarded as out of place, but as so much has been said about rats, it would be a pity to omit mention of so powerful an agent for their destruction. Poison should only be used on a farm (or elsewhere) once a year. The last week in January and the first week in February are the best times to select for this purpose, as the ferreting should then be over. The whole area of ground proposed to be dealt with should be taken in hand at once, and preliminary feeding should be uninterruptedly continued for a fortnight at least. In our opinion, meal is the best food to use, and this is mixed with sugar, grit, and aniseed. The grit is inserted to take away the rat's suspicions, arsenic or strychnine being afterwards substituted. The meal is carried in a bag, and the feeder goes

on his rounds with a spoon fixed at the end of a long stick, by means of which he dispenses his treacherous generosity to the perhaps grateful but unsuspecting rodents. He knows, to within a few, how many rats there are upon the ground visited by the amount of meal they consume. Having gone his daily rounds regularly for the period named, the fatal date arrives, and with the meal he mixes the requisite quantity of poison, which any chemist from whom the stuff is purchased will direct. This he places well inside the holes in identically the same manner that he has before deposited the feed, and we hardly exaggerate when we say that every rat on the ground for the preceding ten days at least falls a victim to the strategy.

During the process of feeding it is wonderful how tame the rats will become, and instances are known where they have come out of their holes and actually eaten the meal from the spoon of the feeder. There is this difference between using strychnine and arsenic: when rats have taken the former, they immediately make for water, where they die, and the bodies thus become more scattered, whereas when

taking the latter death is not so sudden, and they generally have time to get back inside their holes before they expire. Poisoning is most successful in exterminating rats, especially from root-hales. On one occasion we remember no less than sixty dead rats were found inside one small hale of mangold-wurzels. The day after the poisoned meal has been laid, the operator goes on his round as usual. On this occasion he collects most carefully all the meal which is not consumed, and takes it away with him; he effectually obliterates any traces that may be left; he closes all the doctored holes, and deeply buries every dead body he can find. This is a most necessary precaution, and should on no account be neglected.

Many people use phosphorus paste on bread for poisoning rats, but we deprecate the practice because it does not act so quickly as the substances before mentioned, and the rats will carry it about from place to place, which renders it dangerous to other creatures.

We have heard keepers express an opinion that there is nothing so killing as mussels (which have been poisoned) at a certain

season of the year, but on the whole we recommend meal used in the manner described.

Many landlords and tenant farmers are in the habit of offering the boys on the farms a premium for every rat they kill, varying according to districts. The usual capitation grant is three-halfpence to twopence per rat, the boys finding their own traps. If the traps are found, a penny per rat is usual. The rats are taken to the farm bailiff or foreman, who cuts off their tails and enters the number in his book. The first-named grant is the best, for the boys are careful not to lose their own traps, which care they do not always exercise with other people's.

During the months of January, February, and March the duties of gamekeepers are comparatively light, and they will do well to combine with landlords, bailiffs, and tenant-farmers for the purpose of exterminating vermin, especially rats, which are their common enemy.

PART III

A DAY'S RABBETING

IT is a day late in November that sees us driving in the dog-cart towards the scene of action. The leaves are fast falling from the trees, the turnips and swedes are being carted from the fields, and the roads are wet from recent rain. A slight haze is blowing, and the sun is shining brightly upon us, except when it is temporarily obscured by passing clouds.

We are in the best of spirits, and our horse, going a good twelve miles an hour, seems to instinctively feel our sentiments and our anxiety to arrive at our destination.

Our drive is by no means the least interesting item of the day's proceedings. Many a hedgerow we pass where we remember to have stood when partridge driving, and our

recollection is carried back to many a long shot, clean miss, or right and left, as the case may be. Many a gap we recognise, and we see again in our mind's eye the black-tipped ears of an over-confiding hare as she pops through, only to bite the dust and sorely tempt our canine companion to risk all and run in. Many a covert we pass where we have in seasons gone by fired our gun until the barrels were unpleasantly heated, or have stood shivering in a biting east wind for an hour or more without firing a shot. Many a reminiscence do we exchange with one another, and thus the journey seems over almost before it has fairly begun, and we are hailed with a cheery "Good morning, sirs!" as we pull up in the grass-grown stable yard of the country house, whose chimneys are smokeless, whose windows are closed, and whose rooms are tenantless, owing to the deplorable fall in prices of agricultural produce.

The heartiness of the welcome from the old retainer is saddened by our surroundings. We remember when the long range of stables was at all times a scene of bustling activity; when every stall was full, and our horse had to

accommodate itself in a temporary shelter, or share a stall with another, and when our harness had to be placed in our dog-cart because there was no room to place it elsewhere with convenience; when the yule log crackled in the spacious entrance-hall, and the squire's rubicund countenance welcomed us, aglow with the after-fumes of the '47 of the previous evening, and when all betided well for man and beast.

But what a difference now! All around us betokens ruin and decay, and when we hear the plaintive wail of our old friend's dog, who is temporarily confined in the ghostly, gloomy stable, Lord Byron's verse in "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage" is most forcibly brought home to us—

Deserted is my own good hall,
Its hearth is desolate ;
Wild weeds are gathering on the wall ;
My dog howls at the gate.

But *la fortune passe partout*. Let us hope the tide of misfortune has ebbed completely out, that the tide of good fortune is now flowing in, that this dismal scene will become a thing

of the past, and that the old hall will once more assume its pristine beauty and magnificence.

Our dog-cart is housed in the roomy coach-house alone in its glory, our horse made as comfortable as circumstances will permit, and the keeper's dog is liberated and gambols joyously around us.

With a feeling somewhat akin to relief we open the rusted iron gate into the paddock, and turn our back upon the many-gabled house, and our face towards the equally vacant kennels. But here even we do not find much solace. The yards are grown up with rank vegetation, and, towering above all, we notice the broad, spear-headed leaves of a gigantic maize plant, which has secured a hold between the broken bricks of the flooring, and now flourishes triumphant. We cannot resist, for the sake of old times, stepping inside the first yard we come to, where, in days gone by, we received a boisterous welcome from many tongues.

As we stand in the middle of this confined space, Jock, the keeper's dog, comes to a stand opposite a heap of sticks and brambles in one

corner. The next second he has pounced forward and the first rabbit of the day dashes out between our legs with Jock close upon its heels. For the moment we are nonplussed. We have our guns with us, but they are not loaded, and, in a vain attempt to kick over the startled bunny, we deliver the force of our attempted blow into Jock's ribs, causing that quadruped the greatest consternation, not to say inconvenience, whilst we find ourself reclining upon our back on the top of the broken maize plant. Needless to add, that bunny escaped. Jock is apologised to and pacified by many caresses, and our friends have a hearty laugh at our expense. We leave the kennel yard sadder than we entered, and without more ado hasten to the ferret house, which is situated at the back of the kennels. Here we find everything in readiness for us.

Our old friend—whom the labourers on the estate, with greater familiarity than respect, have nicknamed “Tusky Bob,” but whom we address by the more dignified title of Robert, and during moments of excitement, or when we wished to bury the monotony, by the shorter appellation of “Bob”—has selected

a dozen good working ferrets from the twenty to thirty he has in the ferret house, and he has placed them already coped in a spacious ferret box. The line-ferret he carries in a bag for convenience, but it is more often in his pocket than in the receptacle provided for its accommodation.

We look over the ferrets both in the working box and in the house. We pass a few comments upon their appearance, turn off one of our best wheezes for the edification of Robert and the two boys who accompany him, but the point of which joke they one and all miss, and never even smile at, and we then make a start for the day's sport.

At the suggestion of Robert we decide to run through the kitchen garden, shrubberies, and orchard, before commencing to use the ferrets. The first place named is a desolate waste, from which, like the palace of Aladdin, when it was supposed to have been transported into the wilds of Africa, stands out in all its prominence a large three-house vinery. It is walled in on all sides except facing the south, which is bordered by a pond or small lake. But the doors in the walls are rotten, and

nearly all are falling to pieces, with panels out, and easy of entrance for bunny or any one else who chooses to trespass.

The iron gate leading from this garden to the shrubbery, which at one time had its boundary railing fenced all round with wire netting by way of extra precaution, stands ajar, and one of us takes his stand upon its threshold. The other guards the bank on the opposite side of the pond, whilst Robert and the two boys block up other exits with boards, bricks, and anything handy for that purpose which they can find. The beating then commences.

Hardly five minutes have elapsed ere two shots from behind the boathouse awaken the echoes of the lonesome garden. The report startles a water-hen, which flutters out from the sedges under the bank and skims over the water-lilies towards the ivy-grown willow stump, where it knows of a harbour of refuge; but ere it can reach it a charge of No. 6 scatters its feathers on the surface of the pond, and one of a pair of wood pigeons, disturbed in the middle of an early breakfast upon beech mast, is dropped with a mighty splash within

a couple of yards of its feathered fellow victim.

Before we can re-load, several more pigeons pass overhead, and our companion kills another, but it takes him two shots to do it. We, in our turn, are visited by a rabbit who, seeing its passage barred, retires into the creeping ground-ivy round the edge of the pond, to await events, and perhaps congratulate itself upon the vain thought that it did so unobserved. But, now we are loaded, another rabbit races round the pathway, followed by Jock, and so intent is it upon escape that it does not notice us at all. Jock is too close for us to shoot, and the rabbit bolts through the gateway into the laurels beyond, never giving us a chance. Jock is stopped as he passes us, and returns hopefully to the wilderness of overgrown fruit bushes for further research.

Presently a rabbit hops once more into the pathway immediately in front of us and we take a snap-shot at it sitting. To our astonishment it is off, and as the white blob of its tail disappears into a row of raspberry canes, we shoot with the second barrel, not at the rabbit, nor at the white blob of the tail,

but where we think the rabbit ought to be, and we do not know the result until after the beat is completed, because it would be injudicious to leave our post. Several more shots are fired by both of us; the garden is hunted a second time; the creeping ivy round the bank of the pond beaten with satisfactory results; and we at length block the gateway into the shrubbery, which is the next place to receive our attention.

If the kitchen garden was a wilderness, what shall we designate the shrubbery? A miniature virgin forest would perhaps be appropriate. There is hardly a path passable. The once well-kept lawn is knee deep with rank grass; the fountain opposite the conservatory door, wherein gold-fish were wont to disport themselves, is scarcely discernible from beneath its encasement of wild-briar; the arbour of honeysuckle, once such an elysium upon a soft spring evening when the nightingales are in song, is now a tangled mass, a thicket, which no one would ever believe to have been anything else; the statues in the shady nooks are green with moss and black from rain-water and the dripping from the overhanging trees;

The pond is entirely overgrown with weeds, upon which the early signs of winter begin to be apparent. All is desolation, and our thoughts are once more beginning to wander, when three rabbits shoot across the opening like will-o'-the-wisps, and we are barely in time to secure the third before the straggling laurel leaves close over its hindquarters.

We take the shrubbery as best we can, in sections, and add materially to the bag. In a small potting-house, situated in an obscure corner, we find one rabbit and four rats; in the fernery we add no less than five rabbits to the bag; also another pigeon from a small contingent who were returning to the beech tree, and we leave the gardens behind us. We cannot but be pleased with the sport, and grieve to think that there, of all places, we should be able to obtain it.

On emerging upon the paddock we count up the slain and find that we have no less than seventeen rabbits, three pigeons and one water-hen. Had we been permitted we could have killed several pheasants, for we flushed one cock from the kitchen garden, and seven from the shrubbery round the house, but these

we had been requested to spare, and we naturally did not abuse the confidence that our friend had placed in us.

In the orchard we were disappointed. We had begun so well that naturally our hopes ran high, but there was this great difference between the orchard and the last places we had visited: the former was honeycombed with holes and the rabbits had every chance of escape, whereas the latter places were comparatively free from holes, and if we did not get a chance at the rabbits the first time they were started, we could hunt them round again and again. The orchard was as overgrown as the shrubbery, and this and other drawbacks we have mentioned so hampered us that we only bagged three rabbits when we had expected to obtain at least four times that number. Passing from the orchard we find ourselves in the rookery, and here we tried our first earth with the ferrets.

The earth was a large one and the ramifications of the burrowing extended from the roots of a giant fir-tree in all directions, with bolt holes where one least expected them. We soon found that two guns were sadly insufficient

to properly shoot the earth, but this did not in any way deter us from doing the best we could. The solemn Robert placed our companion on the left, whilst we were told off to guard the right. He then administered a cuff on the head to that nondescript canine quadruped Jock, to counteract the exuberant spirits that were visibly rampant in him after his wild chasing in the tangled enclosures we had recently come from, and, selecting six ferrets from the box, he placed them in the burrows which were the freshest-looking and had the most sandy entrances. He retired, as he had approached, on tiptoe, and we breathlessly awaited results. Five minutes passed, they seemed to us hours ; then no less than five full-grown rabbits sprang out of the various bolt holes before the eyes of the excitable Jock, and darted over the greensward as hard as they could go. One made for the orchard, three went straight away for the rookery fence, distance some 200 yards at least, and the other popped in again as quickly as it had come out.

It is a sad record to make, but *veritas prevalebit*—only one was killed, although four

shots were fired. Jock was disgusted. He showed his contempt by refusing to retrieve the only one killed, and exhibited a strong and hardly-to-be-checked disposition to pursue the others to the rookery fence, which we had the chagrin of seeing them reach in safety before our eyes. One rabbit even had the impudence to stop, sit up on its haunches, and gaze at us before it popped into the fence. Our companion avers to this day that that rabbit was related to the one described in *Alice in Wonderland*, and the reason it stopped was to salute us after the manner of very vulgar little boys, and he further asserts that he actually saw that rabbit

Put its paw unto its nose,
And spread its toe-nails out.

Before we have fairly recovered from the shock, two more rabbits pop up, and, after running a few yards, disappear again as suddenly as they came; but we stop one, and, almost immediately afterwards, another. Jock's spirits revive, and Robert actually grins. A white ferret comes out for an airing, sniffs round a bit, and disappears. Then follows a long

wait of ten minutes, and Robert vouchsafes the remark that "They ain't starting very grand this morning." One more sneaks out from a distant bolt-hole and gets out of shot before we can get on him, and the order is given "to receive ferrets."

Soon after this a young polecat ferret appears, and one of the boys goes to take it, but the moment his hand is near to the ferret it sets up its back and hisses at the boy, much to the alarm of that youth, who immediately withdraws. So also does the ferret. Robert is annoyed, and calls the boy "a duzzy young fool," and "if he's as much an old woman as that, the sooner he goes home the better." We pass no comment upon this eulogium, but simply reflect, during which time the ferret reappears and is picked up by Robert in person. The others are all gathered during the next five minutes, except one, and a boy is told off to watch the holes with a couple of rabbits, in order the better to entice the ferret out and get it more away from the entrance to the earth, when it appears, before he makes an attempt to secure it.

We try our fortune at a smaller earth in a

similar manner as above mentioned, the number of rabbits shot being three.

By doubling the rookery hedge to the horseshoe pond we get two more, and here we are met by our other boy, who had previously been despatched for the lunch.

It is a pleasant corner, and we do not make further attempts to better ourselves. Seats are improvised from upturned baskets, and a gate unhinged, whilst no time is lost in discussing the good things that have been provided for the occasion. A favourite drink with Robert is "old strawberry," and, knowing his weakness, we have been careful not to forget it. It is a beverage easily obtained by mixing a strong proportion of gin with well-seasoned old ale, and on a cold day is most acceptable. But to-day it is sunny and warm, and having no biting wind to chill us we leave the "old strawberry" respectfully alone, and what Robert is unable to dispose of finds a resting place in the tail-coat pocket of his velveteen jacket, in prospect of a future thirst.

Fifteen minutes for a quiet pipe, then we decide we must be up and doing. We have not far to go. A fresh-looking earth awaits us

within a few yards, and feeling lazy after our meal, we prefer to sit where we are in readiness rather than stand, as we most certainly should do. Naturally, this lazy indifference affects the bag. Three rabbits seek the sunshine together, and without waiting a moment to survey their surroundings, take to the open at a tremendous pace, making tracks for an earth in the centre of the park, and distant some hundred yards or more. Only their white crested sterns and ear-tips are exposed to view, and the four shots we fire make them run the faster. Of course we stand up after this and expostulate, each abusing the other for suggesting the more comfortable position, which of course we each indignantly deny.

On rising we are able to realise that, had we been standing when the rabbits bolted, we should most probably have bagged all three, as on the other side of the earth is a slight dip, and when the rabbits scampered into this we, being situated as we were, shot over them. But the consolation remained that such a little incident as this makes the remembrance of the day's sport all the pleasanter in after years, and were it not for

such unusual incidents the doings of many a day might fade entirely from our memory.

After we had been kept in suspense for a good ten minutes, the ferrets appeared, and we moved our stand to the earth above mentioned. This is an old working, which for years had been growing smaller. Once it had covered some twenty square yards, and now only green hillocks mark the entrance to former burrows, whilst here and there a patch of yellow sand glistened in the sun's rays, at times becoming painful to the eye, which is of necessity fixed in its direction.

We turn in eight ferrets and watch and hope.

Without doubt we have to watch, and the longer we do so the less hopeful do we become.

This burrow is a distinct fraud.

We saw three rabbits enter, so we know there are some there, and the working on the sand seems to indicate there were several others before they arrived, but the fact remains that none came out.

Five minutes, ten minutes, twenty minutes pass—no bunny. Robert grins, as is his wont, and, reaching down into the folds of his

velveteens, produces his line-ferret, who is by no means indisposed for a little exhilarating exercise.

Several times the ferret investigates the twists and turnings of the burrow, from its various entrances and bolt-holes, but without apparently being able to locate the laid-up rabbits and ferrets. But in one way it is successful, for we pick up six of the eight ferrets whilst these investigations are going on. The other two ferrets we never see again, although we are subsequently informed that Robert trapped them during the night in his box ferret-trap.

At this juncture we are joined by the boy we left watching the other earth, who brings in triumph the laid-up ferret, which he had managed to decoy out of its temporary layer. His face falls somewhat at being told he must now remain and watch here until further orders.

Once more, collecting our traps, we proceed to a grassy bank, overgrown with trees and honeycombed with holes. Robert tells us to be ready for warm work here and to be sure and give any wounded rabbit another shot

rather than risk the possibility of its crawling into a hole, as, should the ferrets take it into their heads to lay up here, they will be most difficult to recover. Robert's anticipations are fulfilled—we most decidedly do have warm work.

Our companion is placed on the water meadow below, whilst we lean against a tree trunk and guard the crown of the bank.

All the ferrets, except the line-ferret, are put into the holes, and, before Robert has located half of them, the fun commences. Out of one hole and into another; from the bottom of the bank to the top, and *vice-versa*; round the tree trunks, and straight away from us towards a distant plantation; before us, behind us, and here, there, and everywhere, bunny shows himself, and we burn powder to our hearts' content.

The shooting is rendered somewhat difficult by reason of the shortness of the majority of the runs, the baulking nature of the tree trunks, the unevenness of the ground, and the fear of hitting one of the party by a ricochet shot. But, if it is difficult, it is all the more

congenial to our tastes, and it is the best, the most enjoyable, and the most sporting stand we have all day.

For nearly half an hour we keep up a constant fusilade, and, if the shooting is not as good as we would wish it to be, we nevertheless add materially to the bag. By degrees the firing decreases, and only a random shot at intervals causes Robert to turn his attention to the important part of taking up his ferrets. Marvellous to relate, in this network of holes we experience no difficulty in regaining them, and, within five minutes of his having picked up the first, the last is also taken.

The afternoon having considerably advanced, and having two ferrets still laid up, we deem it advisable to refrain from visiting fresh ground where the use of the ferrets would be required, and, having seen them comfortably ensconced in their box, we leave them under a tree and wend our footsteps towards a plantation which skirts the northern boundary of the park.

Picking up both boys on the way, we have two most successful drives, bagging eleven rabbits and a pigeon, and thus ending one of

the pleasantest days at rabbits, with the assistance of ferrets, that is recorded in the annals of our humble little game register.

The shades of the early November evening are rapidly drawing in as we return through the rookery, and when we look back to the westward we notice fleecy leaden-coloured clouds chasing each other across the crimson-tinted sky. The gaunt old oaks look weird in the uncertain light, and a creepy feeling runs through our veins, which a nearer acquaintance with the ghostly buildings of the Hall does not assist to allay.

In feeling our way through an overgrown ride in the orchard, a big barn-owl flutters in our faces, and with a screeching "Too-whoo!" nearly causes us to forswear on the spot the use of all alcoholic drinks in general and whiskey in particular.

We do not even partially recover from the start we thus receive until we find ourselves once more bowling along the road for home, having left the dismal range of stables, and Robert waving an adieu to us with his dilapidated old horn lantern (almost a historic curi-

osity nowadays), well behind us; nor do we wholly recover until we have each appropriated a comfortable arm-chair on opposite sides of the blazing hearth at home, and, over the port wine and nuts, relate to each other the minuter details which have been omitted from this narrative—how we should have made certain shots, and how it was we missed other shots; what we had done and ought not to have done; and what we had not done and we ought to have done.

We both talk and crack nuts at the same time, neither answering the other, but each relating his own version of the proceedings without comment or opposition, when our companion brings the proceedings to a climax by bursting into song, the words of which, if not as follows, were equally appropriate:—

Come, you who love the pastime of the fields,
And hear a brother sing their charms with glee,
Of joys the rabbit to the sportsman yields,
When yellow autumn tints the forest tree.

The shady lawns our sober steps invite,
Through thickets dress'd in golden autumn's pride,
To see our spaniels range—a pleasing sight,
To lazy sluggards and to sots denied.

Shooting—a manly sport that care defies—
Let us enjoy it (fortune) to the end,
And share the pleasure with the lads we prize,
For what is life, or wealth, without a friend?

Now raise the bumper to the fervid lip ;
Let Chloe's name be usher to the glass ;
And ere the moments from our mem'ry slip,
Let ev'ry sportsman give his fav'rite lass.

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